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THE GATE BEAUTIFUL

AND

OTHER BIBLE TEACHINGS FOR THE YOUNG

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BY

HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

AUTHOR OF 'BIBLE TEACHINGS IN NATURE,' 'THE MINISTRY OF NATURE,' ETC. ETC.

And you shall touch with your finger-tips
The ivory gates and the golden.

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TO

The Young People

OF THE FREE WEST CHURCH, GREENOCK,

TO WHOM THEY WERE FIRST SPOKEN,

THIS SERIES OF BIBLE TALKS

IS DEDICATED, WITH EVERY GOOD WISH,

BY THEIR LOVING PASTOR

HUGH MACMILLAN.

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PREFACE

ONE of the wise sayings of the Talmud is that "Jerusalem was destroyed because the teaching of the young was neglected; for the world is saved by the breath of the school children." In no previous age has the truth of the latter part of this Jewish proverb been so widely recognised as in this. The distinguishing characteristic of our age is the great extent and variety of its work for the young. A vast literature for their special benefit has sprung into existence; and a prominent portion of the Sunday services is set apart for them in most churches. This great increase of effort for the religious instruction and welfare of young people at the present day cannot but have a powerful reaction for good upon all who are engaged in the blessed work. There is no one indeed who ministers in spiritual things to the children but must feel that he gets more than he gives, learns more than he imparts, and creates for himself a whole new world of interest and

delight. The elder who in this way serves the younger realises the meaning of the striking fact that the term "juvenile," applied to those whom he teaches, comes from a Latin root which signifies to help; and we older people find that the more we help the juveniles the more they will help us, and save us from the care and the hardness of the world, and infuse fresh energy and hope into our spirits.

The addresses that appear in this book have been selected from a series given to the young people in my church on Sunday forenoons during the past two years. They are not, properly speaking, children's sermons, but rather talks on religious topics adapted for young people beyond the stage of children, and in the formative period of life. I have endeavoured to use great simplicity of speech, though at the same time I have not been careful to avoid all words of more than one or two syllables, and have often cast my remarks into forms that might seem to be more suitable to a more advanced stage of life. For I believe that in these days of universal education the youthful portion of one's audience is often fully as intelligent as the older members who had not in early years enjoyed their advantages. The subjects and the mode of treatment are somewhat uncommon; special prominence being given to

some of the most familiar and interesting of the teachings of nature,' which this age of science has enabled us better to understand. "He is the best speaker," says an Arab proverb, "who can turn the ear into an eye." My desire is, by adopting an easy pictorial style, to come up to this standard, and in the object-lessons of this book to show what a great storehouse of beauty and interest may be found in the truths of Divine Revelation for the instruction and guidance of the young. It will be a great gratification to me if in this form they can be made useful beyond their original sphere.

H. M.

GREENOCK, *September* 1891

CONTENTS

		PAGE
1.	The Gate Beautiful	1
2.	The Wishing Well	14
3.	The Instinct of Home	22
4.	The Finger Ring	32
5.	The Marks of a Child	42
6.	The Thistle	60
7.	The Misletoe	70
8.	The Sling and the Stone	84
9.	The Ship of the Church	93
10.	The Leopard's Spots	103
11.	The Barberry	115
12.	The Healing Shadow	121
13.	The Oil of Kindness	127
14.	Perfumed Garments	136
15.	Curiosity	144
16.	Consideration	155
17.	The Father of the Rain	165
18.	The Emerald Rainbow	176
19.	The Treasures of Darkness	186
20.	The Snowdrop	197

PAGE

21. The Sparrow 211
22. Gifts from Above 222
23. The Gold of Sheba 233
24. A Roundel 246
25. Laid-up Goodness 255
26. Faded and Wind-driven Leaves . . . 265
27. The Game of the Torch 274

I

THE GATE BEAUTIFUL

"The Beautiful gate of the temple."—Acts iii. 10.

The door of a house is usually marked out from the rest of the building by finer stones, or by pillars or carvings. The gateways of a city are always more magnificent than any part of the walls. The gates too are often made of costly materials and richly adorned. At Florence the bronze gates of the Baptistery of the Cathedral are so wonderfully carved that Michael Angelo said they were worthy to be the gates of Paradise, and persons are always standing outside admiring them. There is a natural desire to make the entrance to a city or a house as important as possible. In proportion to the progress of a people is the grandeur of their gates and doors. The Esquimaux and the Caffres crawl into their huts as an animal creeps into its burrow; but the doorways of the Egyptian and

Assyrian temples were very lofty ; for these great people felt that their worship was an elevation of man, and that in going in to perform it in the temple, they were doing so in the company of the god himself, who therefore required that the gate should be lifted up. Splendid doors and gates mean an honoured and welcome entrance, as opposed to stealing in without a right. We have front doors and back doors ; and the front door is always grander than the back door, because it is by it that the sons and guests of the house go in. We even make for the purpose a gateway adorned with wreaths of leaves and flowers, over the road by which the conquering hero comes, in order that by passing under the triumphal arch he may be suitably welcomed and honoured. And at the gates of ancient cities the grandest ceremonies were performed in honour of the returning general who entered in at the head of his procession.

In accordance with this common custom of man God says that He will make the gates of His Church on earth of carbuncles ; and we are told that the gates of the heavenly city are each made of one pearl. There was a gate in the temple of Jerusalem which was called " Beautiful," because not only all the glory of the inside of the temple was seen by the worshipper at a single glance when he passed through it, but also be-

cause the gate itself was made of Corinthian brass as bright and as precious as gold, and so richly carved that it was far more splendid than any other gate of the temple. Now the temple of religion has a beautiful gate in it; but in one important respect it differs from the Beautiful Gate of the Jewish temple. On the pillars on either side of that gate were engraved in Greek letters the words, "Let no stranger pass beyond this on pain of death." All Gentiles were shut out, and even Jewish women. But through the beautiful gate of the gospel every one is free to enter into the holiest place. Jesus has quenched with His own blood the fiery sword that kept the gate of the lost Eden; and now, like the stranger that passed through the Lion Gate of Mycenæ—one of the oldest towns of Greece—and who left his sins and his debts behind him, and was made at once a citizen, so all who pass through the beautiful gate of Christ's atoning sacrifice, are pardoned and freed from the grasp of the law, and brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

And not only can any one go through this beautiful gate into God's presence-chamber, but he can do so at all times. In each of the great churches of Rome there is what is called the Porta Santa or Holy Door. It is made of a peculiar marble, and is sealed up for fifty years,

so that no one during all that time can obtain admission through it to the high altar. In the jubilee year the reigning Pope knocks at this door with a silver hammer; and immediately it is pulled down, and a breach made through which the Pope followed by a splendid procession can pass, and minister in the most sacred place. But not like this Porta Santa is the beautiful gate of the gospel. Not at long intervals is it opened. To every one who knocks, however feebly, and at whatever time, it swings back at once and gives admission. All that is needed to entitle any one at any time to admission is faith and love. There is an old German fable which tells us that a man happened one day while walking among the hills to be struck with the beauty of a bright blue flower growing beside his path. Plucking it he put it in his breast, and as he went on the rock in front opened up, showing a deep cave. Entering in he found great heaps of gold, which he eagerly gathered. When all his pockets were filled he turned to go out; and as he was passing through the doorway he dropped the flower and forgot all about it in his hurry, and immediately the rock closed upon him with a thunder-clap and cut off his heel. In the story of Ali Baba or The Forty Thieves it is a word "sesame" which makes the door of the cave open and give

admission to the treasures within ; and the curious thing is that this word "sesame" is the name of a well-known Eastern plant which has a great many valuable qualities. The moral of the two stories from the East and the West is that it is not a dead thing, a mere charm, but a living plant,—a living power that can open the door to the most precious things in life. And so it is not a dead form of religion, or a mere traditionary belief, but a living faith that will open to you the door to the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus.

It is a beautiful gate by which you enter into God's kingdom. The idolater cringes and debases himself before his strange god, with which he has nothing in common, and seeks his favour in a way the most degrading to human nature. But the Christian worships a God of the same nature with himself; and therefore God honours and dignifies that nature when it returns from sin and folly to seek Him in whose image it was created, and by whose Son it is redeemed. The everlasting doors are lifted up that you may pass through, and the salvation wrought for you is a great salvation worthy of the greatness of your nature. Not by a back or a side door of grudging admission do you creep in unobserved, but by the magnificent main portal, in the face of all

heaven—of the angels who rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. Not by a compromise, but by an undoubted right for Christ's sake do you enter in. The ancient Romans had a strange law which required that when a man returned from captivity in a foreign land, where it had been reported that he had died, he should not enter his house by the doorway. He could not recover his right of possession and citizenship unless he entered his house through the roof; and then he was supposed never to have been out of it. Not thus is admittance to be obtained into the kingdom of heaven. There can be no make-believe that the redeemed sinner has always been in the Father's house. The captive, the wanderer, dead in trespasses and sins, must return by the one living Way, and enter in by the one living Door open to all—viz. a simple faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

But while the gate of the temple of Christ's religion is thus beautiful to all, it is especially beautiful to the young. You are to enter the temple of religion by the gate of innocence, before you have had any experience of the dark sins and trials of the world. Youth is the most beautiful door by which to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Later on in life the entrance becomes indeed a strait gate. It is difficult to escape from

the snares and the habits of evil; and those who are saved after a lifetime of sin are saved as by fire, with a painful remembrance of their past misspent years, and reaping perhaps the bitter fruit of the poisonous seed they had then sown. But if you enter in the earliest morning of life's day, you will find the gate easy and wide. It will open to you of its own accord, at the beck of the angel that accompanies you. The Beautiful Gate of the temple of Jerusalem was so heavy that it required twenty men to move it; but Josephus tells us that on one occasion during the siege of Jerusalem it was seen to open itself, and this was regarded as a good sign that God would open to the imprisoned Jews the door of escape out of their troubles. And so in youth the door of grace, that those who seek to enter in late in life find so difficult to move, will become wide open to you. As the song says—

> "But the innocent child with eyes undim
> As the sky in its blueness o'er him,
> Has only to touch the portal's rim,
> And it opens wide before him."

When the cares and troubles of life come to you, you will have no choice, but to seek refuge in God. A stern necessity will wring from you the cry for help, "To whom can we go but unto

Thee?" You will be bound to the altar with cords as helpless victims. But in your youth you can offer yourselves a living sacrifice; you can bring your whole heart to God freely, spontaneously. You can come to Him, not when you have found by a sad experience that the world is false and cannot satisfy you, but when the world is beautiful to you, and life is fairest and happiest, because you are attracted by something better and more beautiful in God. You go to God as naturally as the eye seeks its light, and the ear its music, for which they were created, and the sunflower turns to the sun which is the source of its life. It is easy for you to believe. Grown-up people have to go back and become as little children in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven; but you are in that condition already, and can go in just as you are. You have only to hear and obey the voice which says, "Continue ye in My love." You have the qualities of faith, hope, and love, required of those who enter in. They are easy and natural, as it were, to you; and you have only to exercise them, not towards earthly, but towards heavenly things.

And how beautiful is this gate of youthful piety—beautiful as all first things are, first love, the first light of the morning, the first flowers of

spring, the dawn of human history in Eden, the golden age of the world; beautiful as all pure things are that have no alloy or base mixture of evil in them! The child's religion is like nothing else on earth. Heaven is indeed round about it It breathes all the freshness of the eternal spring.

You ask how are you to get this beautiful religion? In a very beautiful way! Not only is the temple itself beautiful, but the gate by which you enter it is beautiful. It is like the beautiful fruit of the orange tree, which you get through the beautiful and fragrant orange blossom Jesus says, "I am the door, by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." How beautiful and costly is that living door! What a wonderful death of self-sacrificing love he died! Never was there such moral beauty as may be seen in Him. And Jesus becomes a door to you such as your nature requires. He suits His long step to your short step, and narrows His octave to the stretch of your little fingers. He brings His infinitude within the narrow compass of your nature, and touches it at every sympathetic point, as Elisha stretched himself upon the body of the child. It is not such a mature experienced religion as is suitable for grown-up persons that He asks from you. He does not come to you as the Ancient of Days with His hairs as white as

wool to give you difficult lessons and hard truths ; but He becomes a child to you, that you may find it easier to learn of Him and make Him your pattern. The great Erasmus gave to some school children to repeat always at school the beautiful motto, "We boys would ever remember our master Jesus—the boy of boys." He loved you and gave Himself for you, and by loving Him and trusting in His grace as your kind friend, young with the youth of eternity, you can go in through this beautiful gate into the enjoyment of all the blessings He has procured for you. You can go in and out ; you will have no feeling of restraint. This beautiful gate is like a swing-door that opens either way out or in. You enter through it out or in into a large free world, into perfect liberty.

And what a beautiful gate of the temple is the Word of God ! How full it is of bright examples of early piety and goodness ! What interesting stories, what splendid images, what bright glimpses of heavenly glories does it contain ! It is not by a dull wearisome method that you learn the truth that is to make you wise unto salvation, but by a path strewn with flowers, and through a door like that of Solomon's temple overlaid with gold, and having on the top of its pillars lily-work. If you have got the "open

sesame" of faith by which this beautiful gate opens, you can go in and bless the Lord and behold and enjoy all the endless riches which you will find there.

And what a beautiful gate of the temple are the ordinances of the Church! "How amiable are thy tabernacles!" said the Psalmist; and he felt that a day spent in the courts of God's house was better than a thousand. These ordinances are pictures to you of the things that are in the heavens; object lessons by which you can more easily understand the truths of the gospel. The Lord's Supper sets before your eye what you are accustomed at other times to hear with your ear—the dying love of Jesus shown by the bread and the wine. Children are naturally poets; and what has become common and prosaic to grown-up people is seen by you to be the most poetic of all things, leading your thoughts out into the true homeland of the spirit. The house of God, looked at in this light, will be, like the "Palace Beautiful" in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, full of sights and sounds that take heaven down to earth, and bring you under the powers of the world to come. You have that within you, even the youngest of you, which can make the church a solemn place whenever you enter it. If you have reverence, if you attend carefully to all the exercises of

worship, if you come in a prayerful spirit desiring to get good, you will have more and more a growing feeling that you are entering by the gate beautiful into the very presence of God. You will feel like Jacob, and say, "This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

You remember it was at the Beautiful Gate of the temple that the first miracle of the Christian Church was wrought. Peter and John as they went up to pray cured the lame beggar there. And so the poor and the maimed are placed still at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, that heaven may be all the more beautiful to them, seeing that earth is so dark and miserable. Heaven opens its most beautiful gate to those who are made perfect through suffering. The kingdom of heaven belongs of right to those who are poor in spirit. And these wounded and maimed ones are placed there in God's Providence, that you may see and help them when you go into the church to praise God for His goodness to yourselves, and when you go out to do good in His name in the world, and to carry the lessons you have learned in God's house into your everyday life. Silver and gold you may not have wherewith to do good, but you can give what money cannot buy or do—a healing and

enriching love. The gate will be more beautiful to yourselves, as beside it you help to make the world more beautiful for others. And through the beautiful gate of early piety may you all pass on and grow up into beautiful lives, fulfilling all the fair promise of your youth, each of you a temple of the Holy Ghost!

II

THE WISHING WELL

"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness."
—ZECHARIAH xiii. 1.

WHEN I was at Nice, I visited a beautiful spring that bubbled up on the side of the hill above the town. Its water was clear and cold, and on a hot day was very refreshing. It was called the Wishing Well; and any one who drank three draughts from it, forming in his own mind a wish between each draught, his wishes, it was said, would be granted. There are many wells said to possess the same mysterious power in our own country, to which people long ago went to get their diseases cured and their wishes fulfilled. Usually there was a tree or a bush growing beside them; and those who drank the water either put a coin, a pin, or a button into the well, or they tied a bit of their clothing, or a woollen thread around a branch of the tree, as a

gift to the spirit that was supposed to live in the water.

This old-world superstition has passed away almost altogether in these enlightened times; but the prophet Zechariah tells us of a famous Wishing Well which belongs not to superstition, but to the true religion. It was to spring up in the place where David lived, in the heart of Jerusalem; and it was to heal the souls of the inhabitants of that city, to cleanse them from all their sins and make them pure and holy. There can be no doubt that the prophet referred to the well of Christ's grace that was to spring up at the coming of the Messiah; for Jesus was a descendant of David, and offered up his atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world on the Cross at Jerusalem. What was a prophecy in the days of Zechariah is now an accomplished fact. What he looked forward to we look back upon. The day foretold has come; the fountain has been opened up; and here and now you can all stand beside it in the gospel. It is a true wishing well; and there is a Spirit in it who can do for you exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think.

"I wish I had a pony; I wish I had as much money as I wanted; I wish I could play all day long." These three wishes a little boy in the country one day expressed aloud, after drinking

from a wayside wishing well as he was returning from school weary and tired of his lessons. "If we could get what we wish," he said to his sedate little friend, who was busy looking over next day's lesson as he walked along, "what would *you* wish for?" His companion, who was wise beyond his years, and who had early known the grace of piety, quietly replied, "I would like to get a clean heart." Was not that a wise wish? Is it not the first and best of all wishes? Is it not the very thing that we all need most, from the oldest to the youngest? Have you ever seen an oyster-shell opened? What a contrast there is between the rough, course, dirty outside, and the smooth, white, pearly inside! The oyster indeed keeps the inside of its cup and platter clean. But it is otherwise with man. No matter how fair and good may be our character and conduct on the outside, God, who looks upon the heart, sees it filled with sinful imaginations and impure affections. And we ourselves sadly know that we are not what we seem. Even the youngest of you must feel that his heart is not right with God, and that it is deceitful and wicked; that it is not so fresh and innocent as it once was. You have already done some things of which you are ashamed; which you would not like your father and mother to know; which you would wish that God himself did not know.

Now, this unclean heart is the cause of all your unhappiness. When you are ill, you do not enjoy anything. There is a dimness in your eye and a faintness in your heart which prevent you from seeing any beauty in nature or any brightness in life. The want of taste in your own body takes the relish out of everything else. And so sin is a sickness that brings a shadow over the world. When the heart is faint with this disease it cannot see or enjoy the good of anything. You might give all the pleasures and riches of the world to a sick man, and he would not care for them. And you might give a person who had an unclean heart everything that heart could wish, but he would have no heart for it, no true enjoyment of it. Therefore, if you wish to be happy, if you wish to enjoy life, if you wish to realise to the full the beauty of God's world, and the goodness of all the fair bright things He has provided for your delight in it, you must go down to the root of what is hindering you from getting this happiness, and wish above everything else, first and foremost, for a clean heart.

The pony, or the money, or the endless play which the young schoolboy wished to get as he drank of the wishing well, was beyond his power; the well would not give any of these things to him, even if it was for his good that he should get them.

But the wish of his wise companion for a clean heart, which is a thousand times more valuable than any gifts of fortune, is within the reach of every one. All who truly wish for it may become the happy possessors of it. Here the fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness. It flows at the foot of the Cross. The wishing well of the gospel is beside you. Jesus Himself stands by and says, "Ask and ye shall receive." Drink of the water that He gives you out of the well of salvation, and make it as you drink your ardent desire above everything else to obtain the clean heart which He has promised; let it be your sincere, humble, earnest prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me," and you will assuredly get it. You remember how the leper said to Jesus, "If thou *wilt*, thou canst make me clean." He knew that Jesus had the power to take away his leprosy, but he was not quite so sure that He had the will. But Jesus said to him, taking his own words, and putting His answer into the mould of his own prayer, "I will; be thou clean." And so, if you come with the prayer and the faith of the leper to Jesus as He stands now beside the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, you will get the same blessed answer and feel the same blessed cure.

The old wishing wells promised to those who

were foolish enough to believe in them to do a great many good things for them ; but they were not able. They disappointed the poverty-stricken diseased people who trusted in them. All that they could do was only what Jesus said of the water of the well of Sychar, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." They could only refresh the body for a little time ; they could not satisfy the immortal nature of man. But the fountain opened to the house of David can cleanse from sin which causes the thirst of the soul ; can purify the unclean heart which is the cause of our unhappiness; and make the heart itself to be a well of joy within us. It can make the blind to see clearly, like the pool of Siloam ; it can make the old worn-out young and strong, as the fabled fountain of youth was said to do. Sin is the cause of blindness, of oldness, of decay, and of disease ; and cleansing from sin, this fountain makes the eyes clear-seeing, and the heart ever young and fresh, and the life healthy and vigorous and happy.

There is a lonely little pool of water in a hollow on the mountain side near Tarbet, Loch Lomond, called the Fairy Loch. If you look into it you will see a great many colours in the water, owing to the varied nature of the materials that form its bottom. There is a legend about it which says

that the fairies used to dye things for the people round about, if a specimen of the colour wanted was left along with the cloth on the brink of the pool at sunset. One evening a shepherd left beside the Fairy Loch the fleece of a black sheep, and placed upon it a white woollen thread to show that he wished the fleece dyed white. This fairly puzzled the good folk. They could dye a white fleece any colour; but to make a black fleece white was impossible. In despair they threw all their colours into the loch, giving it its present strange look, and disappeared for ever. This may seem a foolish fable, but it has a wise moral. What the fairies could not do beside the Fairy Loch, the Spirit of God can do beside the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. He can make the blackest soul white. God says to you beside it, "Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet [the fastest colour known to the ancients] they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

At this "wishing well," as you drink to-day, what do you wish? Do you wish some good *thing*, or a good heart which enjoys all things; *some* happiness, or that which *gives* happiness; a single rose that will soon wither or cease to please, or a living rose-tree that will yield you

endless successions, of fresh roses? Abraham sent away the sons of his concubines with a few gifts; but he settled his inheritance upon Isaac. God sends away the ungodly with the riches and honours of the world; but He makes over *Himself* to His people. They have not only the gift, but the Giver. And what hath God more to give than Himself? Ask, then, at this Fountain in the house of David, that God may be the portion of your inheritance and of your cup; and then indeed your heart will be pure and your life happy. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" that is, make and keep his life pure, bright, and beautiful. "By taking heed thereto according to Thy word;" by taking pains to live after the pattern of Christ's holy life, and according to God's holy law.

III

THE INSTINCT OF HOME

"I will arise and go to my father."—LUKE xv. 18.

ONE of the most interesting subjects of thought among scientific men at the present day is the subject of what is called hereditary instincts; that is, the communication by parents to their offspring of their own peculiarities. It is the law of nature that like produces like; and it is wonderful how constant that law is; how invariably the vine produces grapes, and the apple tree apples after its own special kind. There are some remarkable illustrations of the power of this law continuing when the circumstances are entirely changed. Plants taken from distant lands will flower only in this country in the corresponding seasons in which they are accustomed to put forth their blossoms in their native place, however unsuitable these seasons may be. You all know how the tame ducklings that are reared from eggs laid

under a hen, take at once to the water when a pond is near, to the great terror of their foster-mother. And you have noticed how some pet dogs, when they are going to sleep, scrape with their feet, and smooth the sofa or the cushion on which they wish to lie, and go round and round before settling down. This is a survival of the habit which their ancestors had in the wild state when they made their beds of leaves and moss in the forest. Lambs a few weeks old are fond of playing upon any hillock that may occur in the otherwise level field in which they are born. The reason of this is that the ancestors of the sheep came originally from a very mountainous country, where they used to sport among the snowy heights like the chamois; and this instinct of its original Alpine home reappears in every lamb that is born in our English fields, and is manifested in its love of playing on the highest ground it can find. It has often been remarked as a very strange thing that a donkey will not leap over a stream however narrow. It sets its feet hard, and looks as if it were afraid of the water; and you cannot get it to move with all your entreaties and blows, though it could leap three times as far over dry ground. The reason of this is that the ass belongs originally to the sandy deserts of the East, where there are no running streams; consequently the old instinct

remains in it, and when it sees in our country streams and running water it gets scared and confused, not knowing what to make of it. You would imagine that in the lamb and in the donkey, that have been for more than a thousand years in our country, the habits of their ancestors would long ago have been rooted out by their altered circumstances, and that they would have settled down to become like their surroundings in all their ways. But you see by the survival of the old instincts how no change of circumstances and no lapse of years can entirely take away what originally belonged to the creatures.

The instinct of the original home is very strong in every animal and plant. It is strongest of all in man. The Scottish Highlander who took roots of the heather with him to Canada, that he might have a remembrance of his native hills always before him; the Irish emigrant who took the seeds of the whin and sowed them in his garden in the United States, that he might have a picture of the yellow whin bushes that shed a halo of glory around his humble old home in Tipperary —showed how strong was the tie that bound them to the place of their birth. And every grown-up man or woman knows how the heart when far away often yearns for the dear familiar scenes where the years of childhood were spent.

The memory of a happy home has frequently been the means of reclaiming many a lost wanderer, and preventing many a sorely-tempted soul from entering upon forbidden paths. It was the remembrance of a father's home which haunted the prodigal son in the far country, and followed him through all the bitter experiences of his misery. It was the bright picture of his home drawn upon his heart, and often conjured up before his imagination in his dark and lonely hours, and the sad contrast between that beautiful image and the wretched present, that caused him to resolve and say, "I will arise and go to my father."

The instincts of our nature cannot be altogether repressed. Instances are recorded of children having been changed at their birth, and yet showing unmistakable proofs, however different were their circumstances, of their true parentage as they grew up. Louis Philippe had all the low tastes and cowardly feelings of the ignoble race to which he is said to have belonged, though seated on the throne of France; whereas the real child of the French king, who was supposed to have been exchanged for him when he was born, because she was a girl, exhibited all the pride and dauntless courage of the Bourbons in her humble condition. What was in the blood came out in spite of the difference in the circumstances. And so the

poor prodigal in the lowest degradation, serving his master in the far country as a swine-herd, and seeking to satisfy his hunger with the husks which the swine did eat, could not forget the grandeur of his father's home and the wealth and abundance of it. He had not sunk so low as to have that memory blotted out, and to be satisfied with his condition. There was no scarcity of food for the swine ; and if the prodigal were at home in the far country he would have had no famine in it. But his hunger showed that this was not his native land ; and was the beginning of the divine fulness in him. And because there floated before him a vision of the imperial palace from whence he came, and the noble instinct of home still survived in his heart, he resolved to arise and go to his father.

There are certain instincts which man loses as he grows in civilisation. The cultivation of his greater but purely human faculties extinguishes his animal instincts. There are animals that hear sounds which we cannot hear, and perceive colours of which we have no idea. A dog by the scent can trace its master, however far he may have gone, even through villages and crowds of people, with the most unerring certainty. And a dog or cat can find its way back to its own home, although it has been taken away by a route which it could

not possibly follow on its return, and which it could not have observed on the way. Nothing is more wonderful in nature than the migratory instinct of the cuckoo and the swallow and the crane, by which they cross great tracts of land and sea without any marks to guide them, in order to reach places which they left when they were, one would suppose, too young to know them again or to learn the way to them. Human beings have not inherited these wonderful instincts; they have not survived in any member of our race. No lost child has ever possessed the power of finding its own way home. The boy or girl who has wandered among the woods or hills to some unknown place cannot of its own accord return. There are many thrilling stories of children being lost in the Australian bush or on the American prairie and being found at last when they were nearly dead with hunger and fatigue, having wandered round and round in a circle in the same spot. And so, though the instinct of our heavenly home remains in us, however far we may have wandered from it, yet we have no sense by which we can return unaided. The prophet says: "The stork in the heavens knoweth the appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming, but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." We must therefore

be guided back by a higher power. God must plant the desire to return in us, and guide us by His Spirit in the way. And assuredly He who created the wonderful instinct in His creatures by which they find their way in the strangest places to their destination will, if you ask Him, conduct you, as He conducted the Israelites, through the pathless wilderness to your true home.

My dear young friends, you are like the children of a king stolen in infancy by gipsies, and living a wandering life amid mean and sordid things. But you still bear the royal image of your Father ; you still remember the palace where you were born. Longings for your true home come over you. You are made for God, and the old attraction lives, and as the needle turns to the pole, so do your hearts instinctively turn to heaven. Wordsworth, in his beautiful "Ode on Immortality," speaks of children as clouds of glory from the heavenly home, and says that heaven lies about them in their infancy, and that they bring a heavenly sweetness with them into the world from God. Too soon the glory fades into the common light of day, and heaven mounts away far above their heads. Their bright home as they wander away from it vanishes in the distance, and the dark thorny paths of earth lie before their feet. But the memory of it never leaves them.

And it is the recollection of the Father's home and the Father's heart hidden deep in the soul of every sinner that when awakened leads to salvation. You are all prodigals, but you are prodigal *sons*; and it is the *son* in you that makes your recovery possible. It is because you come of a noble race that you cannot be satisfied in your sins—with the vain, empty, worldly life which is offered to you in this far country. The prodigal could not be satisfied with the husks of the swine, remembering the abundance of his father's home; and you cannot be satisfied with the sinful enjoyments of the world, remembering the pleasures that are at God's right hand. This is the tie that binds you to the better life to which God is calling you. It is by the good that remains in you, which all your sin has not been allowed to destroy, that you, a sinner, are to be saved. Even in your ashes, as the poet says, live your former fires; and these embers can be fanned by God's own breath into a flame of holiness purifying and transfiguring you. It is not by dwelling on your sins, but by dwelling on the picture of your Father's home and your Father's love that new and tender feelings will be stirred within you; and you will condemn and despise yourselves because of your long coldness and alienation; and you will hasten at once to make your peace with

your Father, and enjoy the blessedness of your true home.

You are like the lamb that is seeking to satisfy the deep instinct of its kind for the snowy mountains, by gambolling on a little mound that scarce rises above the level plain. The worldly joys with which you seek to satisfy your immortal nature are like low mounds compared with the everlasting hills. You cannot but remember the lofty heavenly land from whence you came, nor help looking to the hills from whence cometh your help. Do not quench or pervert, but obey the instinct. Ask God to send you directly by it to the large place where you will be delivered from all your straits and littleness, and your nature will be made like your home. If you could take a lamb born in one of our flat green meadows to the Alps or the Himalayas, it would soon be at home among the snow-covered crags; its instinct would find free scope in the keen elevated air and the far-extending prospects, and it would speedily go back to its original wild state. And so, if you forget the world and its sins, and remember your Father's home and your own people, the instinct in you that is now starved among the low vanities of earth will be satisfied with the glorious things of heaven. As you arise and go to your Father, the far country where you expected to be so happy,

to which distance lent its usual enchantment, will appear to you in its true colours as a land of bondage and misery; and your Father's home, which you had once thought so wearisome and tame, will now appear to you a paradise which you wonder you could ever have left, the goal of all your longings, the centre of all your blessedness, as you come nearer and nearer to it.

IV

THE FINGER RING

"And put a ring on his hand."—LUKE xv. 22.

THIS is a very interesting and instructive ceremony in the restoration of the prodigal son. Though many people, especially young persons, are fond of rings and admire them much, yet in our country they have hardly any meaning. They are worn principally by rich persons as mere ornaments. The only ring that has a distinct meaning with us is the wedding-ring—which is the symbol of the marriage union. But among ancient nations rings were used to mark out the rank and office of the wearers. The king wore a signet-ring with his royal arms engraved on it, with which he stamped every decree that was made in his realm. The Pope, when he was elected, received what was called the "fisherman's ring," with a picture on it of St. Peter in a boat fishing. The bishop of a church, when he was

consecrated to his office, got not only a crozier or staff, but also a ring. The early Christians wore rings with Christian emblems upon them, such as the anchor, the palm-branch, the dove, or the fish as the symbol of Christ, to show that they were followers of Jesus, and to separate them from the Pagans around. Among the Romans in the time of Christ no one was allowed to wear a gold ring, unless he himself, his father, and grandfather were free-born. They had what was called the *jus annuli aurei*. A slave wore an iron ring, and if he became a freedman he could wear a silver ring; but in order to entitle him to wear a ring of gold an express decree of the Senate was required. Thus you see that among the Romans the wearing of a peculiar kind of ring was the mark that distinguished the different classes of society, and separated the freeman from the slave. This is the meaning of the act of the father in the parable putting a ring upon the finger of his son when he was restored. The prodigal when he left his home wore a gold ring as the symbol of his rank and condition as the son of a nobleman. But he soon lost that badge, along with the other goods that he had taken with him from his father's house and wasted in riotous living. And he sank to the condition of a slave,

and was employed by the citizen of the far country in the meanest employment to which a slave could be set. When he came to himself he felt that he had forfeited for ever the right to be a son in his father's house, and was prepared to accept the position of a slave in it, if he would only be received. "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But the father at once restored him to the dignity he had lost, and put upon his finger the gold ring which was the sign and seal of his sonship —the proof that he was no longer a slave, but a freeman, the son of a nobleman.

And is not this what God bestows upon you when you repent of your sins and turn to Him? You have indeed reduced yourselves by your sin to the condition of slaves. You have lost the badge and the marks of sonship. You wear the iron ring of the bondsman; and the iron ring is connected with a chain, by which the devil leads you captive at his will, and makes you yield your hands and your feet as members of iniquity unto iniquity. But God does not cease to be your Father, even in your bondage and misery. You are still His children; and He works by His Spirit and providence to bring you back to Him; and when you return to the home you have for-

saken and the Father whom you have offended, He sees you afar off, and goes forth to meet you, and He receives you with a joyful welcome, and takes off the iron ring of the slave from your finger and puts on the gold ring of adoption. You lost the original gold ring of freedom and sonship which man once possessed ; you sold it for the pleasures of sin ; and now you get a new gold ring—the ring of a more blessed freedom and a higher sonship than Adam knew before he sinned and fell. You are made heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus. You are brought into a nearer relationship with God than the angels and archangels. You have freedom of access to His throne of grace at all times; you have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God ; and you have a title to the inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. It was a wonderful honour that was conferred upon Joseph when he was taken from the terrible prison and made ruler over Egypt, and Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand and put it upon Joseph's hand. It was an amazing distinction that was bestowed upon Mordecai when the great king Ahasuerus took off his ring and gave it to the poor despised Jew for his faithful services. But it is a far higher honour that God bestows upon you when He

takes off His own ring and gives it to you, who were the slaves of sin and bound in the prison-house of death, and exalts you among the princes of His people, and makes you kings and priests, to reign in the earth. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

The ring which God gives you is the assurance that He will forgive you all your sins. There is a tragic story told about Queen Elizabeth and her favourite, the Earl of Essex. She gave him a ring, with the promise that she would pardon any fault of which he might be accused when he should return that pledge. Long afterwards, when he was condemned for treason, the unfortunate earl, remembering the promise of the queen, sent the ring from his prison to her by the hands of one of the Court ladies, whose husband unfortunately was the bitter enemy of the earl, and forbade her to deliver it to her royal mistress. The queen was expecting to receive the ring, and was prepared to grant freedom to the earl. But when it did not come, she believed that the earl no longer cared for her, and therefore left him to his fate, and he was beheaded. When the lady who received the ring was on her death-bed, she sent for her royal mistress, and told her what she had done, and gave her the fatal ring. But the queen

in a rage cursed her bitterly, and said, "God may forgive you, but I never can." Now this tragic failure cannot possibly happen in your case. The appeal of your ring will always come home to God's heart; and He will pardon, when you remind Him of it in prayer, all your treason, and blot out all your transgressions, and receive you into favour again.

The ring that the father gave to the restored prodigal was the guarantee that all that he had belonged to his son. There is a fable of a magic ring which an ancient Greek herdsman called Gyges found in a cave, by means of which he got possession of the kingdom and married the queen and received vast wealth. To have the ring of Gyges was afterwards used as a proverb of those who got all they wanted without any trouble. Now, your ring is a better ring than that of Gyges. The engraving on it is, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It bestows upon you the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus. It puts you in possession of all that your Father has. You remember the ring of Aladdin in the fairy story. When he rubbed it a genius appeared who did everything and procured for him everything that he wanted. God has given to you a wishing ring, and every time that you rub it, every

time that in prayer you ask Him to do for you what you need for Christ's sake, He will do it. He has boundless treasures at His disposal for your happiness; and all that is necessary to make them available to you is that you should rub your ring by sincere and constant prayer. "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, make your requests known unto God."

Your ring is also a proof that with all the blessings you get from God, no sorrow will be added. We read in classic story of a famous king of Samos called Polycrates. He was such a favourite of fortune that everything prospered with him. His uniform success was a cause of great uneasiness to his friend and ally Amasis, who believed that the gods would be jealous of it, and would surely bring about his ruin. In order to avert the jealousy of the gods, Polycrates was advised to make a sacrifice to them by casting away the thing which he valued most. He had a most beautiful ring made of an emerald, the workmanship of a celebrated Greek artist, upon which he set much store; and this he determined to give up to the gods. He went therefore on board a ship, and sailed far out to sea, and dropped his ring into the waters, and

mourned the loss of it very bitterly. But a week after this a fine fish was presented to him at his palace by a fisherman who caught it in a distant part of the sea ; and when it was opened in order to be cooked, lo, the emerald ring was found in its inside! The gods would not take the gift, but returned it in this way to the giver. And this was regarded as an omen that Polycrates would not come to a good end since he was fortunate in everything, and even found again what he had thrown away. And this omen came true, for Polycrates was in the end defeated in a great war, and put to death by his enemies in a degrading manner, by being crucified. Now the ring of God which you wear can have no such fatality connected with it. It will cause all things to work together for your good. So far from your heavenly Father being jealous of your worldly prosperity, He will give you with it the blessing which maketh truly rich, and with which there will be no drawback. The promise of your ring always and in all circumstances is, "Trust in the Lord and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Live out fearlessly the divine rule to which the wearing of God's ring pledges you, and daily your life will grow richer in love and honour and the supply of all your needs. The world will ever make room

for those who live after the pattern of Christ; it will lavish its gifts upon them, and they shall dwell securely under the shield of its honour and love. And even if reverses of fortune should come, there will be always for you meat to eat which the world knoweth not of—and a peace which the world cannot give—and a home out of which all the dark forces of the universe cannot drive you.

Finally, your ring is the token that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord. Queen Elizabeth sent a ring as a token of friendship to Mary Queen of Scots, with the promise that if it were sent to her at any time she would do her best to help her friend and sister. Well, Queen Mary in her troubles in her own country threw herself upon the protection of Queen Elizabeth, and sent the ring with a letter; and soon after followed them in person to England. The memorable ring formed the quaint device of two right hands, supporting between them a heart made of two diamonds, one of which Queen Elizabeth kept, when she sent the ring with the other diamond heart in it to Queen Mary. And yet with all this profession of love and devotion we know how false Queen Elizabeth proved. The empty socket of the ring where the diamond heart should have been, and which she

kept on the pretence of friendship, was a symbol of her hollow, heartless profession of love. You all know how it was through the treachery of Queen Elizabeth that the poor helpless Scottish queen, who trusted her friend so entirely, came to the block. Now, God cannot act in that way. He has given you His heart with His ring. He is faithful that promised. His mercy endureth for ever. And having once loved His own, He loves them unto the end. He gives His heart to you, and you give your heart to Him ; and the tie that binds you—your clasped hand of love—neither life nor death can separate.

V

THE MARKS OF A CHILD

"Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right."—PROVERBS XX. 11.

ONE of the commonest doings of a child is to leave the marks of its dirty or buttered fingers on the edge of the picture-book which it handles. Parents have often been vexed at this untidiness; and the little transgressor has been scolded for it. But these finger-marks are characteristic in more ways than one. They show not only the carelessness of the child, a quality which it shares with a great many children, but also the child's own peculiar personality.

If you examine one of these finger-marks carefully, you will find that it is made up of a number of fine roundish lines, which proceed, like the ripples of a pool, from a central point. If you look at the under surface of your own finger-tips, you will notice that the skin is marked with thin furrows and ridges, arranged in a very distinct and regular

order, one round the other, from the first joint to the top. It is these ridges and furrows that make, when the finger-tips are covered with grease or dirt, the objectionable mark, like the lines of an engraving on the page of a book.

Now the remarkable thing is that the pattern of the finger-mark is not the same in every case. It differs in different persons so much that it has been proposed to make use of it as a means of finding out who people are. The thumb-mark in wax has often served the purpose of a seal to attest a deed ; and Sir William J. Herschel, when he was filling the post of a magistrate in the Indian Civil Service used to insist upon persons putting the impression of their thumbs beside their signatures on wills and other legal papers conveying property ; and he found it to be most successful in detecting impostors who pretended that they were the owners, and in preventing disputes about the genuineness of the papers. In China the method has been employed from a very ancient time to identify prisoners. When Mr. Thompson, the leader of the American Geological Survey, was working among the Indians, he paid those whom he employed by orders upon the nearest bank, which were marked with the impression of his thumb, and looked like the scroll of fine lines which you see on a blank cheque. He wrote his

name and the amount of the order across the thumb-mark ; and that mark was so peculiar and so well known that it was impossible to change the figures written on it without being found out. The finger-marks of the same person remain very nearly unchanged throughout life. Sir William Herschel made impressions of the two first fingers of his hand, and then twenty-eight years afterwards he made other impressions of the same fingers ; and he found that though there was some little difference arising from the effects of age, and of wear and tear upon the skin, the peculiarity of the finger-mark was retained in all its essential integrity. The child's finger-marks differ so little from those of the full-grown man, and are so characteristic, so peculiar to the person, that at every stage of life you could find out his identity by it.

I have drawn attention to this striking fact, to show that you could be known, not by the large well-known features of your face only, but even by such small and usually unheeded points as the lines on your finger-tips. God has made every part of your body so different from that of every other person, that even by the markings in the iris of your eyes, the branching of the veins on your skin, or the impressions of your finger-tips, you could be identified, though you were as like some one else as twins are said to be.

Now, my dear young friends, you are making thumb-marks on every page of life, as you are turning it over, and these thumb-marks are peculiar to yourselves. People looking at them know them at once to be yours ; and they know by the appearance of them what kind of person you are—whether your work be pure, and whether it be right. People tell you that they can read your character by your handwriting ; and gipsies profess to tell your fortune from the large wrinkles on the palms of your hands. But whatever amount of truth there may be in such guesses, there can be no doubt at all that your doings are characteristic. The words you speak and the acts you perform show what your true character is. These are the outward expression of your inward nature. Some thoughtless persons who have not much observation say that all children are pretty much alike. They differ in appearance, but their ways are very much the same. They have all the same innocent guileless manner ; and there is no individuality about them. This is not the case. Every child has a different nature, and shows it by marks of its own, which those who watch the behaviour of the child can recognise at once. There is as much character about children as there is about grown-up persons ; for the poet Wordsworth says that the child is father of the man ; and what the man turns out to be is what the

child was first. When you see several children quite still, which is a very unusual thing with them when they are in health, you might perhaps be at a loss to know what the true nature of each of them was; but whenever they begin to speak and act they betray themselves. When playing their games, the different characters of children come out. Some are bright, good-humoured, obliging, ready to play at any game that others like. Others again are touchy, and are apt to turn cross and sulky when they don't get their own way, and do not care to play at any game unless they themselves propose it or take a leading part in it. According to an old legend the Queen of Sheba, when she came to test the wisdom of Solomon, dressed a number of children, boys and girls alike, and she asked him to distinguish between them. He commanded a basin of water to be brought in, and bade all the children wash themselves. Some began at once to wash their hands and faces vigorously in the water, others began timidly and gently to wash their hands and faces. Solomon said that the former were boys and the latter girls, and he was right.

You can tell the species of a tree by its flower and fruit. "By their fruits ye shall know them," the Bible says. The leaves of a tree may be very like the leaves of other trees; but when it ripens

and fruits the difference comes out at once. I was walking in a fine old garden one day; and nearly side by side in it there were growing two bushes that looked so exactly the same in their mode of growth, in the shape and colour of their leaves, that any one seeing them would say at once that they were both holly bushes. They had precisely the same glossy green prickly foliage; there was not a bit of difference between them in that respect, and yet on the one were long tubes of scarlet flowers which showed at once that it was not a holly but a gentian. Without these flowers the bush could not be distinguished from its neighbour, which was a genuine holly, as its flowers testified. You remember in the parable of the tares and the wheat how they both grew together in the same field. They were both so like each other that the servants who wished to pull up the tares would be in danger of pulling up the wheat instead, or the wheat along with them. So long as they both put forth the blade only, the keenest eye could not distinguish the one from the other. But when they both came to the ear, the tares could be detected at once by their dark and lean heads, and the wheat was revealed by its full-formed golden spike. And so it is among children. They may look equally good to one who does not know them; but let the stranger see their doings, let

him hear their language and see how they act towards their parents and towards each other, and he will judge each child's character correctly by its doings.

An experiment was made not long ago in a school in England, to test, not the knowledge, but the character of the scholars. A number of them were allowed to remain for ten minutes in a room which they had never seen before, and then they were each asked to write down a description of it from what they remembered. The examiner did not know the children, and therefore had no previous idea of their character. But when he went through the papers which they had written, he was able to tell, from the way in which they described the room, the character of each child so truly that the teachers all said that it was most remarkable. Some had given a correct description of the room, so that it could be recognised from the description; others gave an account of the room so vague and confused that nobody would have known it. Some noticed one thing and overlooked the other things; others noticed everything. Some described things that were not in the room at all, but only in their own fancy. In these different ways the children showed whether they were careful or careless, whether they were truthful or imaginative, whether they had orderly or confused minds. The character

of each was shown clearly by a great many little touches in what they had written. And the knowledge of the character of the children acquired by this test had a practical value in guiding the teachers as to how they were to educate each child —to remove defects and to strengthen and train up excellencies.

It is wonderful how early a child manifests what is in it. The first leaves of a young ash or beech tell the nature of the tree as distinctly as the oldest foliage of the full-grown tree. The natural goodness of the heart and the cross ill-nature reveal themselves in a thousand ways even in the nursery. In the year 1200 the people of Bearn, in the south-west of France, deposed three of their rulers in succession on account of their wickedness. The heirs next in line were the infant twins of one William de Moncede. A deputation was sent to the castle of this prince, to choose one of his children to be their ruler. When they arrived they found the twins asleep and watched their behaviour. They were exactly like each other, and were equally healthy and beautiful. It was most difficult to make a selection between them. As they gazed the visitors noticed that one of the twins had his little hand tightly closed ; while the other had his tiny palm lying wide open upon his bosom. They chose the one with the open

hand ; for, they said, " he will be a liberal and bold knight, and will best suit us as head." They accordingly carried him off and educated him among his future subjects. The event proved their sagacity ; for the object of their choice lived to be a wise and popular ruler who gave his people good laws and prosperity. In the Highlands of Scotland it used to be a common custom to put a silver coin into the hand of a new-born child by way of luck, and watch how the child received the gift as a test of character. If the infant shut its fingers over the coin, it was considered to possess a hard grasping nature ; if, on the contrary, the infant kept its hand open and allowed the coin to remain in it or to slip off, it was thought to have a generous open-handed character. When the first child of our home came to us, a very old woman came one day to see her, and placed a shilling in the little dimpled hand, and the babe closed its fingers upon it for a moment, and then opened them and let the coin drop to the floor,—a trait of character which I must say has been characteristic of her ever since. Very soon do the virtues or the evil passions of the soul display themselves. The first buddings of sin or the first germs of godliness appear in the very youngest. It has often been asked at what period the training of the young should begin. It should commence with the very

first dawn of intelligence, for then the nature of the character to be trained appears.

The proverb says, "Even a child is known by his doings." Why, in reality a child is better known by his doings than a grown-up man! Grown-up people can wear masks and hide their true thoughts and feelings, and speak and act as if they were all that they ought to be, when they are in reality the very reverse. But children cannot do this. Whatever faults children may have, hypocrisy is not one of them. A cunning, sly impostor of a child is a very rare creature indeed. Their tell-tale faces reveal all that is in their hearts. If you put a tuft of moss in water and then squeeze out a drop of it and put it under the microscope, you will see several very strange creatures moving swiftly through it. They are called Rotifers; and their bodies are so clear and transparent that you can see all the parts and the movements of all the organs in the inside of them, as you can see the wheels in the inside of a watch when you open the case. Now children are like these transparent creatures; you can see inside of them, and the movement of all their desires and passions. The child's ways are a mirror in which you can see the image of his soul, and can judge whether his work be pure and whether it be right.

You have in the Bible a remarkable example of a child who was known by his doings in Abijah, the little son of Jeroboam. In him, we are told, was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, and that good thing was all the more beautiful that it shone out in the midst of idolatry and sin. His father's house had departed from the living God and worshipped the golden calf of Egypt. But this little child loved the God of Israel and served Him, and his love to God was shown also by his love to all who came into contact with him. He had found a deep place in the affections of his people; and when he died all Israel mourned for him, which we may be sure they would not have done if he had been cold and proud and cared only for himself. He had not much time to show the good thing that was in his heart; but it was sufficiently long to convince men of its preciousness, and to make all men love him because of it. He had advanced perhaps but a few short steps beyond childhood; but the great end of life had been gained even in regard to character. There are plants which have a wonderful beauty in the very first leaves they produce. Their leaves are lovelier than the flowers of other plants. They do not wait till they reach the proper stage, and then unfold the loveliness of their nature. They give it out at the very beginning, and this is often

the case with those who die young. They are not destined to grow up and produce blossom and fruit like others; and therefore they must hasten to make their very leaves what the blossoms and fruits are in those who live longer.

What a striking example of a child being known by his doings have you in Samuel, who was dedicated to the Lord from his birth! He ministered in the tabernacle in his little white linen ephod which his mother made for him; and got when a boy a revelation from heaven which showed him the fate of his master and the nature of his own future work. This was the case too with Joshua, the son of Nun, who is called in the Bible "a young man who departed not out of the tabernacle"; that is to say, who gave his young life to the service of God in the house of prayer. Outside the Bible you have the pious life of Edward VI., who ascended the throne of England when he was only nine years of age, and died of consumption in his sixteenth year. Notwithstanding his youth and the unsettled times in which he lived, he reigned with wonderful wisdom, for the Word of God was the rule of his life; and his doings were remarkable, for his heart was pure and his work right. And I cannot forbear telling you of one whose name is now never heard, although he did one of the

noblest things in the world. Robert Gould Shaw was an American. His parents were very wealthy and he was their only boy. From his earliest years he gave himself to his Saviour and loved to do good. Never was there a more beautiful childhood and youth than his. He was known far and wide by his amiable doings—by his pure and right work; and when he grew up to be a man he might have lived in ease and luxury in his grand home, but instead of that he left everything, and became a soldier to fight in the great civil war which his country was carrying on to abolish slavery. But not as a captain dressed in a splendid uniform on a noble charger, among his fellows in riches and station, did he serve in the army. No! he became the teacher and the leader of the poor, forlorn, coloured people, who were going to fight for the freedom of their brothers in the south. You cannot understand the bitter dislike and contempt of the white people in America towards the blacks. It required, therefore, the courage of a hero and a martyr combined for young Shaw to march out of New York at the head of the first regiment of negroes that had ever been raised, amidst the jeers and scoffings of the roughs, and the contemptuous pity of those who should have known better. With this regiment he did many a brave

deed, and at last he fell during an assault upon the fortifications of the enemy in the midst of heaps of his black soldiers, and was buried in a ditch with them. When his body was asked for the day after the fight, the Federal soldiers replied, "We buried him below his niggers." That was the noble end of one of the noblest martyrs in the cause of Christ, who since he was a child was known by his doings that his work was pure and right. No wonder that the negroes for whom he gave his life passionately adored him; and one poor fellow exclaimed as he was passing him, "Colonel, I will stay with you till I die," and he kept his word, for he perished with him.

But I must ask you to rise above all other examples to consider that of the Holy Child Jesus. He was pre-eminently known as a child by His doings, that His work was perfectly pure and right. It is doubtless to His mother that we owe the information that we have about the childhood of Jesus, for Mary hid these things in her heart and pondered over them. It is mothers who always supply the stories of their children's lives; and nearly all the good in any man is traceable to a pious mother. A gentleman whose mother died while he was yet young, has spoken of the influence that godly woman had on his whole life.

He could never forget how she, with her hand on his head, first taught him to say the Lord's prayer. Whenever he felt tempted to do any wrong, the pressure of that hand seemed always present, and he dared not yield to temptation. "How can I commit this wickedness," he thought, "and sin not only against God, but against my mother?" Would that every boy had such memories of his mother! It was the mother of Jesus that told us how He grew in wisdom, as in stature and in favour with God and man; how when He was a boy of twelve years of age He went up with His parents to the Passover in Jerusalem, and remained behind in the temple asking questions of the elders and doctors of the law regarding the wonderful things which He saw and heard; and how even when He had learned so much, and knew that He was about His Father's business, He went back with His parents to Nazareth and was subject to them. He did not throw off all obedience and respect for them as soon as He was independent of them. He did not look down upon them, as many clever children are apt to do upon parents who have not been so well taught as they are. He loved them as well as ever, and was as submissive to their will.

Now this is the pattern which you are to imitate. It is not merely by saying your prayers,

by taking part in the worship of God in church that you imitate Christ's example. You can follow in His footsteps in many other ways. You can be like Him as you play at your games, as you learn your lessons at school, as you live at home with your parents and your brothers and sisters. You read the Bible and pray and worship God in order that you may do these common things of your every-day life so as to please God and to be like Christ. Jesus said first make the tree good, and then the fruit will be good. If your heart be right with God, then your doings in the sight of men will be right too; you will show in all you do and say the kindly, unselfish, cheerful temper which God approves, and which every one admires and loves. It is a grand sight to see those who have hoary heads ripe Christians; but it is still more satisfactory to see those who are starting in life possessing the good thing which Abijah had towards the Lord—which will make them grow in wisdom as in stature and in favour with God and man. You are forming your future now—determining what the nature of it shall be. Childhood is the seedtime of life. And gardeners will tell you that upon the condition of the seed depends the future growth of the plants that spring from it. Seeds that are unripe yield weak plants, and

give but a poor harvest ; seeds that are long kept produce the greatest amount of fruit. In the pod of the common sweet-scented stock the perfect seeds, which are flat and shining, give late plants with single flowers ; while the dry shrivelled seeds in the same pod will give low plants with double flowers throughout. You see then how important the character of the seed is in the field of nature. More important far is the character of your childhood, which is the seed of your future life.

Seek then with Christ's help to make that seed well formed and matured, full of spiritual life and energy, so that your goodness early begun may grow with your growth and increase with your years, and the latest flower and fruit of your life may be but the full unfolding of what was in the seed of your childhood. Seek to act always in character as the children whom Christ has blessed. Seek to live so that only work that is pure and right may be looked for from you, and your doings will always witness to the goodness of your heart ; and all who know you may testify when they hear of some noble thing that you have done, It is so like him ; it is only what we should have expected him to do.

You will say often with fear and apprehension, "I am only a child, and cannot do much." You are apt to compare yourselves with some bright and

shining grown-up Christians, and say, "I wish I were like them." But if you have Christ's life in you, you will grow more and more to that likeness, and your very failures will have in them the seeds of success, if you use them as you should. I saw one day two large snow-white swans sailing on a pond. They were accompanied by their young ones, whose plumage was of quite a different colour, viz. a dingy brown. I thought of Hans Christian Andersen's beautiful story of the ugly duckling, which was in reality one of those cygnets or young swans. The young swans, you know, have feathers of a different colour from those of grown-up swans. But they are swans still; and as they become older they grow more like their parents, and assume pure white plumage. And there is a kind of swan called the Polish swan, whose young plumage is white, the same as the adult plumage. And so, though the religion of children may differ in some respects from that of grown-up persons, it is the same in kind. And children pass through several stages before they take their final hue and form; although some, like the Polish swan, are pure and white from their very childhood. But all Christ's children shall grow into the family likeness, and become fairer as they mature in the Christian life more like Christ, and more like one another.

VI

THE THISTLE

"Thistles shall it bring forth to thee."—GENESIS iii. 18.

THE thistle is the national emblem of Scotland, and Scotchmen ought therefore to be specially interested in it. It is the symbol of the curse pronounced upon our fallen first parents, and therefore all the world should be interested in it. By its rank growth in our fields it makes the cultivation of the ground more difficult, and the produce of human toil more scanty. We are apt therefore to despise it as a worthless and noxious weed. And yet it is full of instruction to the mind that attentively considers it.

One of the lessons which it teaches is that there is nothing so bad in God's world but it has some redeeming feature. The form of the thistle is one of the most artistic of all forms. Painters and sculptors are fond of copying it in their works; and the capital of the most beautiful of

all pillars, the Corinthian pillar, is formed of the carved foliage of a kind of thistle. Then, too, rough and bristling with spines as are its stem and leaves, it produces a purple crown which may well compare in stateliness and beauty with the blossom of many a plant of brighter fortune. It is lovely to the naked eye when carefully considered; but it is far lovelier when examined by a magnifying glass. Each of the purple fringes of which the head is composed is a distinct flower, with its parts perfectly formed; so that the plume of the thistle is not in reality one flower, but a collection of hundreds of flowers,—a bouquet of flowers growing together of the most exquisite hue and shape. Each part of the flower has its own work to do, and is changed in shape or colour according to its work. One part sacrifices itself for the sake of others; one produces honey; another attracts by its colour insects to fertilise the plant; another helps to produce seed. Each part has its own excellent quality; and the effect of their combined labour is to promote the welfare of all.

Thus we see that there is nothing God has made that does not bear His hall-mark of beauty upon it; and in like manner there is no human being made in the image of God, however sinful and vile, but bears some trace of that image.

The thorniest, most useless human thistle has a beautiful purple flower—some kind affection or good quality which should inspire our respect and regard. And so long as a person has that he is not wholly lost, and we need not despair of his restoration. There is a handle by which he may be laid hold of and reformed. I believe that the greatest criminal, the most abandoned outcast, may be reclaimed, if we only knew where the good part of his nature is, and could appeal to his better feelings.

Young people especially are very apt to be severe and sweeping in their blame. But when so disposed, you should pause and remember that even the thistle has a purple plume, and does its own work perfectly. The character you condemn is not wholly bad. In all likelihood the person you despise has some one good quality which is wanting in yourself, or which you have in an inferior degree. You are sure that some one, of whom you know next to nothing, is conceited or stupid; whereas, if you knew him better, you would find him to be amiable and modest. I have often thought of the wonderful wisdom shown in the precept of St. Paul, that we should esteem others better than ourselves—that we should prefer each other in honour. The object of your contempt may in reality have more patience, or more

love, or more humility, or more self-denial than you have; and for the sake of that one good quality in which he excels you, endeavour to prefer that person to yourself, and imitate his example in that excelling gift or grace. Remember the purple plume of the despised thistle when in your gossip you are ready to say hard things of each other, not from want of heart, but from want of thought and want of knowledge.

Another lesson which you may learn from the thistle is that good comes out of evil. One kind of thistle is called "Mary's Thistle," because its broad leaves are freckled with snow-white veins, which the legend says came from the overflowing of the Virgin's milk upon it when she suckled the Holy Child during the flight into Egypt. And another kind of thistle is called the "blessed thistle," because of its many valuable properties. Its sap is said to be an "effective lotion for inflamed eyes," and a poultice of its leaves soothes the pain of wounds and heals them rapidly. Are not these things an allegory? Is it not with the curse itself as it is with the symbol of it? Out of the prickly stem and leaves of man's sin God has produced the beautiful blossom of redemption. On the stinging growths of the wilderness falls the milk of heavenly love; and many an evil is a blessed thistle healing the heart that it wounds,

opening and curing the eye which its own sting has darkened and inflamed.

Young people need to learn the lesson early and well that all blessings are got from pains. Nothing good or worth having was ever got in this world without effort and struggle. All the advantages of this life are the purple blossoms of very thorny thistles; and in obtaining them you may expect to be severely pricked. If you wish to be rich you must pinch and save, and deny yourself many pleasures, and toil hard every day. If you wish to be learned, then you must apply yourself with diligence and perseverance to the pursuit of knowledge; you must forego your love of ease and idleness, and live laborious days and consume much midnight oil. Whatever be the thing you set before yourself as the aim of your life, you cannot obtain it without giving in exchange for it much of your time and toil of brain and mind. You must grow it, as it were, out of your painful persevering struggles, as the thistle grows its purple plume out of its thorny foliage. There is no royal road, rest assured, to the obtaining even of the humblest aim and object of life.

The ancient Greeks placed the golden apples of the Hesperides in a garden, closely guarded by a terrible dragon; and this dragon Hercules had

to slay before he could get the precious fruit. There is a legend of the same kind told regarding an island in Loch Awe, called Fraoch Eilan, where delicious apples grew which a lover got for his mistress by destroying the monstrous serpent that kept watch over them. The existence of the same legend in Greece and Scotland shows how universal is the knowledge of the moral truth that is conveyed in this mythical form, viz. that all fruit of human endeavour results from the overcoming of some dreaded evil; that only by overcoming sin can we ever eat of the tree of life in the midst of the Garden. Success in anything is not a ripe fruit falling of its own accord into your lap. Even if you could possibly get it in this way you would not value it, and it would not benefit you. To prove a blessing it must be the growth of your own toil and self-denial.

You know the old fairy story of the Sleeping Beauty, which the great artist Burne Jones has illustrated recently in four splendid pictures. The king's daughter, you remember, with all her maidens and her father's court, were held in a deep sleep for a hundred years by the spell of a fairy. Round the enchanted castle in which they slumbered grew a hedge of thorns, which every year became higher and thicker, until at last it closed over the whole building, and hid it from

view so completely that it was difficult to find it. The story of the sleeping princess was told all over the land, and many brave youths sought from time to time to force their way through the hedge to rescue her; but they were one by one entangled in the thicket, and so severely wounded by the thorns that they died. At long last, when the hundred years of the spell were about to expire, there came a prince from a far land, who heard the story, and he was determined to succeed. Strange to say, as he advanced the briars made way for him to pass through, but they closed around his attendants, and would not suffer them to accompany him. So all alone he penetrated to the inner chamber where the beautiful princess lay, and he awoke her out of her long sleep, and she became his bride. I never saw anything more beautiful than the pictures in which the successive stages of the story are told; and nothing could be more impressive than the lesson which the gifted artist conveyed by means of this simple old fairy tale to mind and eye. Does it not teach the familiar truth that if you are to awaken the beautiful talent that unknown to yourself has slumbered long in your mind, you must break through a thorny hedge of difficulties and trials? You will find and arouse the sleeping beauty, and make her your own for ever, whenever you force your

way through the thorny hedge of difficulties that guards her.

People are apt to forget that the same law applies also to the blessings of religion. You suppose that you have only to pray for them, and you will get them at once. God will give them direct out of His own hand into yours without any trust or effort of your own. God's method, on the contrary, is to put you, in answer to your prayer, in circumstances in which you yourselves will be able to work out the answer. You pray for humility, and you expect that God will immediately clothe you with the grace as a person puts on a cloak. But God places you in circumstances in which you will be *made* humble by having your plans baffled and your pride mortified. You pray for heavenly-mindedness ; and God takes away some cherished object, subjects you to loss and sorrow, and so makes you heavenly-minded. It is a fatal delusion that religion is an easy thing, got by a mere prayer or earnest thought at a solemn season or on a deathbed. Eternal life is the purple blossom of a very thorny thistle. You see the thistle and its flower in the Cross of Christ. You see it in John's vision of heaven. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ; *therefore* are they

before the throne of God." Sit down and count the cost now. Is it worth your while to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow Christ? Is the crown a sufficient reward for the cross? Will the radiant blossom of immortal blessedness make up to you for the prickly and wounding leaves of a life of faith in Christ? Then, if you believe that "godliness is profitable unto all things," set about getting it at once, and be prepared to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; for in no other way will you ever be made holy and happy.

God intended the curse of thistles to be a blessing in disguise to man. If our thistles and nettles were to be utterly destroyed, many of our most beautiful insects which feed upon them would vanish too. And so with the disappearance of many of our troubles some of the most beautiful thoughts and actions connected with them, or which they inspire, would also disappear. We have things that irritate and annoy us, and we think that if they were removed life would be happier; and yet when they are taken away we miss them. We feel that we have banished many beautiful spiritual ideas which came to us in connection with them — many prized thoughts and feelings from the heavenly world that made their home in these trying experiences. The thistles of the world have in reality brought out all that

is best and highest in man. In making the cultivation of the ground and the education of his life harder and more difficult, they have made his character nobler and his life richer in every good work. By his struggle with them he has acquired habits of patience and perseverance, and learned lessons which have made him wise for this world and the next.

This, I hope, will be your experience as you have to strive with the thistles which you will find in your life; and of this you may be sure, that the more, by Christ's help, you root out the thistles of unhallowed desires and sinful lusts in the waste ground of the heart within by cultivating it carefully for Christ, the more will the wilderness of the world without for you be free from thistles, and blossom as the rose. I earnestly hope that none of you will prove thistles to others by cherishing a touchy or a violent temper that takes offence at the smallest trifle; but that, on the contrary, in the meek and lowly spirit of Him who was a lily among thorns here on earth, you will present to those who harm you, not the thorny leaf of revenge, but the soft blossom of forgiveness. "Nobody shall hurt me without suffering for it" is a good motto for a patriotic country, but it is a very bad one for a Christian life!

VII

THE MISLETOE

"And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil."—
MATTHEW xxv. 8.

I WISH to take as an illustration of my text the object with which at this season of the year you are most familiar. You all know the misletoe. It was the "golden bough" which belonged to the Pagan worship of our forefathers, and used to be considered a sacred plant which possessed many mystic virtues. But notwithstanding this high character attributed to it, the misletoe belongs in reality to a low degraded class of plants. It has no roots of its own to send into the soil, and so obtain nourishment for itself, but it grows on the trunk and branches usually of the apple-tree, and feeds upon its sap. It is a more appropriate symbol of the text because in Palestine it grows in great abundance in some places, particularly in Samaria, upon the olive-trees, where it is smaller and stumpier than the English form.

If you put a sprig of it into water it cannot drink it up for itself; but, if a bit of the apple branch on which it is growing be put into the water, the misletoe will suck up the nourishment by the help of the branch. It is closely connected with the honeysuckle, and then again with a large number of plants in hot countries which are either grand trees or luxuriant shrubs. It is a near relation of the coffee and the Peruvian bark tree, and many of its connections have large and brilliant flowers.

You can trace the different steps of the degradation of the misletoe from the high rank which its ancestors possessed in the floral world long ages ago. It first, through the struggle with the crowded vegetation of tropical forests, lost its upright self-sustained position, and acquired the power to hang on to other trees, and to be lifted up by them to the pure air and sunlight at the top of the forest. This habit we see in the honeysuckle, which twines itself round other trees, and is supported by them in its feebleness, so that it can get nearer the light. But the honeysuckle, while leaning upon other trees, grows in the soil, and gets its own food. Gradually it descended lower, and became a parasite incapable of living in any other way but upon the food produced by other plants. It sends its apology for a root

beneath the bark into the tissue of the apple-tree, and preys upon its life-blood. And with this loss of the power of self-support it has lost its original splendid properties. Its leaves have become of a dull, pale leathery green, its stem and branches dry and brittle, without any sap, its flowers small and green, and almost invisible ; and the whole appearance of the plant quite different from that of other plants that support themselves. So thoroughly has the misletoe become a mere hanger-on of the apple-tree, that its white berries, which you admire so much, are made so sticky that the seeds which they contain glue themselves to the beaks of the birds that eat them, and in flying away and rubbing them against another apple-tree the seeds take root and begin to grow as parasites from the very beginning. You see the disadvantage of the misletoe's parasitic habit in the fact that, like the yew and the box, it blossoms early in the spring, but does not ripen its berries till near Christmas, and yet it is not a long-lived plant. It gets so little sustenance by its dependent habit that it takes ten months to ripen its fruit, while other self-dependent plants do it in six or seven weeks.

Botanists tell us that the number of plants that live upon other plants is greater now than it ever was before in the history of our earth. The

struggle of life seems to be fiercer, and many kinds of plants have to be supported by others if they are not to perish altogether. It is curious that parasitic plants do not belong to one particular order—form a special class of their own. This peculiar habit of dependence is found over a great variety of classes. Every order of the floral world has its paupers and poor relatives that live upon the stronger and richer; and in every instance they lose with their independence all the useful and noble qualities which they originally possessed, and become mere encumbrances or destructive pests. It would seem that in the vegetable kingdom, while there is progress towards higher and nobler forms, there is also a going down to meaner and baser forms. While some plants are becoming more beautiful, other plants are becoming more degraded. The plants that earn their own living from the soil and the air have a tendency to rise higher in the scale of life; while the plants that hang upon others, and get their food prepared for them without any effort of their own, invariably descend lower and lower, until they lose at last all their green colour, all their bright flowers and leaves, and become the mere wrecks of their former selves.

Parasites in the vegetable kingdom are just the foolish virgins that say to their more provi-

dent and industrious companions, "Give us of your oil;" and they suffer accordingly. The oil they get from others yields them but a very poor subsistence. The same thing obtains among animals. We find the same process of degradation going on among them through the loss of their independence. Animals that do not obtain their own food by their own exertions, but get it from others, either by feeding upon their bodies or upon the food which they procure, are always the lowest and ugliest of their class. They lose their activity; their limbs cease to be of any use to them many of their parts are not developed at all. They pay the penalty of their laziness and improvidence by the deformity of their bodies and the meanness of their lives.

This habit of parasitism cannot be condemned as a moral evil in plants and animals. They are the victims of the laws of nature; they cannot help themselves. But it is quite different in man. God has given him the power to earn his own bread, and has put him under the wise beneficent law that in the sweat of his face he shall eat it. He knows what he is doing, and has the power of choice. And therefore in his case it is a sin if he descends to the condition of a parasite. And that sin is punished in his case far more severely than it is in the case of plants and

animals. He becomes far more degraded. He sinks from a far higher to a much lower state. He loses his mental and moral and physical powers, and becomes the mere shadow of a man, without the power or the desire to help himself, and without any sense of shame or self-respect. You do not think much of persons who say to others, "Give us of your oil," that they may be saved the trouble of getting it for themselves. You despise the husband who lives in idleness upon the drudgery of his poor, industrious, self-denying wife. You scorn the selfish brother who sorns upon his sisters, and keeps them working till they are like to drop to keep him in fine clothes and cigars, because they have somehow, in spite of it all, an infatuated love for him as their brother. You are indignant at the stout beggar who would rather do anything than work, of whom there are so many in our slums, and whose degradation is entirely their own fault. God does not condemn people to a lot of wretchedness; and for every one person who is poor and miserable by the force of circumstances—who cannot get work though they try ever so hard—there are at least half a dozen who have brought their misery upon themselves by their indolence and vice, who are "bone-lazy," and won't work so long as they can exist without it.

Now, my dear young friends, I have not much fear that any of you will grow up to be parasites of that kind, and lose all your manliness, and become selfish, helpless weaklings, supported by the labour and self-denial of others. I know that you would hate such a life. I am sure that your parents will train you to that independence of character which rests on its own resources, and that when you are old enough you will not ask others to do for you what you could as well, or better, do for yourselves. I expect that any boy hearing me to-day will, if spared, grow up to value independence above everything else, to help others rather than to get help himself, to be the protector of his sisters, the support of his parents should they require it in their old age, and the useful friend of all. If you are saved now all trouble, and have no call to exert yourselves, you will give up your self-command, you will lose your power of self-help, you will become more lazy and selfish as the years go on, until you will become unfit for the active duties of life. But if instead you are now instructed to think, to resolve, to act for yourselves, when there is a necessity for it, then you will be prepared to act your part usefully and creditably in the various relations of society.

But it is in regard to religion that parasitism is most to be condemned. The people of

Brittany say that the wood of the Cross was made of the misletoe, which was once a fine forest tree, and which in consequence sank down to this low estate. And so if we crucify the Lord afresh by our neglect of Him—and all those who do not crucify themselves crucify Christ—we share the fate of the misletoe and become degraded. The religion of many people is a misletoe—a mere superstition growing upon the tree of other people's faith. They have no root in themselves. They do not come into direct personal contact with the Lord Jesus, and so get from Him at first hand the blessings of salvation. They have never examined the truth of the Gospel for themselves. They have a traditional faith which they have got from their fathers, with which they are satisfied, without any personal knowledge of the Saviour. The foolish virgins, when they found that their own supply of oil was failing and their lamps going out, wished to get some from their wiser and more prudent sisters. They wanted to borrow in an easy, lazy way what they ought to have bought and paid for with their own toil and trouble. But the wise virgins told them that they required all their own oil for themselves, and had none to spare. And so in regard to the things of the soul there can be no parasitism. No one can live upon another's faith. No one can give

to another the blessings of grace. No man, as the Psalmist says, may deliver his brother, nor make agreement with God for him. The Roman Catholics believe that a very holy man may, by his good deeds, do more than God requires of him, and may therefore have something over of merit that may be available for another. But this is a delusion. Even the righteous are scarcely saved, and the holiest persons have enough to do to keep their own lamps burning. We shall look in vain from men for that grace which only God can supply.

You must each of you seek personally for this grace—seek it at once by earnest prayer and diligent endeavour. God is giving you another opportunity of getting it. He has spared you to a new year. Begin this year by giving yourselves each to Christ, by being rooted in His love, not in the faith or good works of others. You must believe for yourselves; you must work out your own salvation. No one can do this for you; neither your godly parents, nor your minister, nor your church. Each one of you must root himself or herself in the soil of heaven, and grow in the atmosphere of grace, and get personally and directly from Christ Himself what a soul needs for its growth and wellbeing. Scorn to live like the misletoe upon the tree of knowledge, getting your

knowledge of divine things second-hand from others. Go yourselves to the fountain of all truth. Study God's Word for yourselves, that you may earn the praise bestowed upon the Bereans of old, who were said to be nobler than the people of Thessalonica because they searched the Scriptures daily to see for themselves whether the things of which they heard were so. And so you will be saved from the mean and maimed and stunted life of those who are mere parasites of others, and know nothing of their own ; and it will be possible for you to live on earth that higher and nobler life of which, I am sure, you have many a bright vision and hope. In this way you will get your own oil, as the olive berries do, by growing it yourselves. And, however hard and difficult this plan may be in comparison with spunging upon others and getting the benefit of their oil, it will do yourselves far more good ; you will develop into nobler and more useful characters. The oil you get by your own labours from Christ will make the lamp of knowledge burn more brightly ; it will make the wheels of duty go more swiftly and smoothly ; and it will calm better than anything else the storm-tossed waters of life. Just look at the vast difference between the olive-tree and the misletoe, though both belong to the same vegetable kingdom. The olive-tree has a

very hard struggle to get a livelihood out of the bare, dry, sun-scorched rocks on which it grows. You see how gnarled and rugged is its trunk, and how twisted its branches in the struggle. It seems to wrestle in pain with its hard circumstances. But how noble a tree it is; how beautiful is its wood; how graceful its foliage; how generous and useful its berries, yielding the oil which makes the face of man to shine. But the misletoe, that gets its living by preying upon the apple-tree without any trouble of its own, what a miserable, stunted, useless pauper of a plant it is, spending on its wretched dwarfed self the generous sap that would have made the apple-tree far larger and more fruitful.

There is a beautiful myth about the misletoe which I must tell you before I close, for the sake of the lesson which it teaches. Baldur the Good was the son of the goddess Freya, whose worship has given the name of Friday to the sixth day of our week. But he was not immortal like his mother. Anxious to preserve his life from the doom of mortals, his mother made all the created things she knew swear that they would not hurt him. But she overlooked the misletoe that grew on the oak near her home. She thought it was such a poor, soft, insignificant thing that it could not possibly harm any one. She ought to have

known the lesson which all the ages have been teaching us—that in this world there is nothing insignificant—nothing that may not be a means of good or evil. There was an evil spirit called Loki who hated the good Baldur, and whose chief aim and joy was to spoil his beneficent work. This evil spirit found out by a cunning stratagem that the only thing in the world that had not taken the oath not to harm Baldur was the misletoe. So he made an arrow of this uncharmed plant, and killed the beautiful youth with it, to the grief and indignation of all the gods. Now the moral of this legend is easy to find. An arrow made of the misletoe may be as fatal to you as it was to Baldur. You may be proof against other temptations and evils, but if you become like the misletoe and adopt its manner of living—having no true life of your own—trying to get lifted up to heaven upon the shoulders of others—then that habit will certainly kill all that is best and noblest in you. If you act the part of a parasite you will share the degraded doom of a parasite; you will become a spiritual ruin. If you neglect your present opportunities, and seek to make up for the loss by borrowing oil from those who have acted more wisely, you will find that it will be too late; your lamp will go out in the darkness and the gate of blessedness will be shut upon you!

The Latin poet Virgil tells us about Æneas, who, being anxious to visit his dead father in the other world, was directed by a sibyl or prophetess to pluck a golden plant that grew upon a tree in a dense forest around her home. Æneas succeeded; and with this golden bough he entered the world of the dead and saw and conversed with his aged father. That golden plant was no other than the misletoe; but it was said that none could wrench it off the tree save those who were predestined by the gods. So the strength and skill which Æneas exercised were divinely given to him, and that was the secret of his success. It was not the plant alone, but the help that he got with it from on high. But you cannot expect to get to heaven by the golden bough of another's faith without doing anything to win it yourselves. God does not elect you to be parasites upon other people's religion, or even upon the doctrine of your own election. The foolish virgins did not get into the home of the bridegroom with the oil of their wise companions burning in their lamps. And you cannot get to heaven by being the children of godly parents, or the members of a Christian church. You must have your own oil burning in your own lamps. You must enter heaven by your own faith and love to Jesus, and the good works which that faith enables

you to perform. It is the Cross of Christ alone—by which the world is crucified to you, and you to the world—that can open the gates of everlasting life for you. It is not till the ivy lets go its hold of the wall or the tree to which it clings that it flowers, for its blossom and fruit are borne on the long straggling branches that have to do for themselves. And so it is not till you cease to depend upon the faith of others, and exercise a personal faith, that you can produce the fruit that is unto holiness, whose end is everlasting life. Seek then not to utter the name of Christ as a mere magic charm to unbar the door of heaven for you; but seek rather to know Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings. Seek to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

VIII

THE SLING AND THE STONE

"So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him."—1 SAMUEL xvii. 50.

NO subject in the Bible appeals so much to the imagination of young people as the story of David and Goliath. Its interest is of the same kind as you find in the popular children's tales of "Jack the Giant-Killer" and the "Seven Champions of Christendom." In these stories the charm consists in the contrast between the great results of which they tell, and the seemingly small causes which brought them about. The little boy kills the huge giant, and the one brave knight scatters hundreds of his foes; so in the story of David and Goliath, the gigantic Philistine with spear like a weaver's beam, who scorned all the champions of Israel, was laid low by the shepherd lad who met him with no other arms but a sling and five smooth stones from the brook.

You perhaps think that David got his victory

by a miracle; that it was the arm of the Lord alone that enabled him to triumph over natural laws, and to succeed with the use of unsuitable means. But this was not the case. No doubt it was David's trust in God that gave him courage to accept the challenge of Goliath, and made him calm and steadfast when he went down to meet the giant into the valley of Elah between the two armies—in sight of all the Philistines and all the Israelites—at a time when the least nervous fright might have deprived him of his usual skill and placed his life in peril. Without trust in God he would in all likelihood have failed. But he did not trust in God to help him without the use of means; on the contrary, he trusted in God to bless the means which he felt constrained to use. And therefore the story of David is not the story of one who by faith in God wrought a miracle,—performed an extraordinary thing by means which could not of themselves have brought it about; but, on the contrary, the story of one whose faith in God enabled him to do a wonderful thing by the choice of the right means.

But, you say, surely the sling of David was not the best weapon with which to encounter a huge giant, encased in iron from head to heel, whose armour is described piece by piece, as if to give us a better idea of its awful strength. You feel as if

the giant was right when he disdained the youth that came against him, clad and armed only as a simple shepherd, and said, "Am I a dog that thou comest against me with a stick?" and yet when you come to think more deeply of it, you will feel that it was a true and wise instinct which guided David to go forth in this simple manner. Supposing that he had gone to the combat with the armour of Saul, which the generous king, anxious for his safety, offered to lend him, what would have been the result? We are told that he tried on the royal armour, and took in his hand the heavy sword of Saul, who was head and shoulders taller than he; but he found at once that they were not suited to him. They were too large, too heavy, too cumbersome. He could not move freely in them. He had not proved them. It was not with a sword and iron armour that he slew the wild beasts that ravaged his flocks, and took the prey from the lion and the bear. They would have hindered instead of helping him. Armed with such weapons, he would be required, in order to use them at all, to come into close quarters with the giant; and grappling with such a foe, sword to sword and foot to foot, David would have had no chance whatever; for Goliath was twice his height and of more than twice his strength. David therefore put aside the armour of Saul, and

took up instead his own shepherd's sling. That was his favourite weapon; he was accustomed to use it on the hills of Bethlehem where he guarded his flocks; he had found it very effective in destroying the vulture and the beast of prey. It was said of the Benjamites that they had become so expert in the use of the sling that even the left-handed could throw a stone at a horse hair held up and not miss it; and David had perfected himself in the same art. We see at once then how by such a weapon all the advantages of the fight were turned from Goliath in favour of David, and he was more than a match for the giant. He could move quickly about; he could hit his foe at a distance; and the huge size of the giant made him a mark so big and conspicuous that he could not fail to hit it in the most vulnerable part. Thus you see David's wisdom as well as his faith was shown by the choice of weapons which he made. It was his faith that made him wise and prudent; and the result in the overthrow of the giant, although very wonderful, was only what might have been expected from such faith and wisdom working together.

Now the lesson of this old picturesque story is that if you have faith in God, it will give you the support of His strength, and make you brave and steadfast in danger and difficulty. It will also

teach you to choose and to use the right means to secure the victory. You will be able to work miracles by a wise use of means which others would reject with scorn. And rest assured, my dear young friends, that the means which will always be the best are the simplest, those that are readiest to your hand, and those to which you are accustomed. There is no instrument unsuitable or ridiculous if it works good results. Shamgar, one of the early judges of Israel, slew six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad, the long wooden pole with an iron spike at the end of it, with which he had been accustomed to guide the oxen when ploughing. It is always important that persons should use the tools or weapons with which they are most familiar, and which they can handle most skilfully. Other instruments or weapons may be far stronger and keener, and likelier altogether; but if you have not proved them you will inevitably fail.

Many of you have already your ambitions and dreams and hopes, and you say just what grown-up people say, that if you had better instruments, more shining gifts, and larger opportunities what wonders you would do. There is a homely Scotch proverb which says that "a bad shearer never gets a good hook." You might put it in a form which you can understand better, and say that "a bad

workman never gets a good tool." He finds fault with the instrument that he uses, whereas the fault is truly in himself, in his own want of skill or patience or attention. A person who really wants to do it can always make good use of the opportunities and instruments that are within his reach. How often do you find a magnificent writing-table furnished with all kinds of paper and pens and appliances, and yet the owner hardly ever writes a page; whereas another man writes learned books with an old quill and a plain ink-bottle and some common scroll-paper. In the country a would-be fisher sallies out with waterproof boots above his knees, his hat wreathed round with fly-hooks, his pocket-book bursting with all sorts of hooks gaily busked, on his back a huge basket, and in his hand a splendid rod glittering with brass mountings. He goes to the stream, wades into the water, and lashes the pools for hours in vain. Whereas a little way beyond him a country-lad with a hazel twig for a fishing-rod, a line of thin cord, and a common hook which he himself had dressed, is catching fish after fish as fast as he can. Michael Angelo, when he was painting the walls and roof of the Sistine Chapel in Rome with his immortal frescoes, used for some of his best colours the red rock which he found near at hand, and which he ground to powder and mixed with oil. Darwin made

the great experiments which have changed the whole aspect of natural history with the common glasses of his house and the common flower-pots of his garden. I knew a great botanist who lived in a remote part of the country when he was a lad, and could not get a paint-box with which to sketch the interesting things he discovered. So he made his own colours from the juices of plants and the powder of stones, and with drops of his own blood, and more beautiful pictures than those which he made with these rude materials I have never seen. You must therefore look more at yourselves and less at your tools.

"What is that in thine hand?" God said to Moses when he was excusing himself for the third time from the task to which God was calling him. It was a shepherd's rod with which for forty years he had been guiding the sheep, such a crook as every shepherd carried with him; and God showed him by the wonders which it wrought that there was enough power in that rod, which he thought was fit only to keep sheep, to shatter the whole empire of Egypt and to guide his people Israel from bondage to freedom. And so when you do any work for God, He will teach you to use the means at your command, and make them, however small they may be and however little you may think of them, sufficient for all your need.

You can never know what the means you possess can do until you try. You sometimes think that a great trouble requires a great instrumentality to remove it. Goliath and his armour must be met by something in proportion; but God will teach you, if you trust in Him, the secret of the sling and the stone. The advantage will ever be on your side if you have only faith to use the small means at hand with confidence and energy.

There is one giant of evil which challenges every one of you to fight with it. You have some evil temper, some infirmity of nature, some besetting sin to overcome. You cannot fight this giant with Saul's armour, for it is too heavy for you, and you have not tried it. You cannot use the weapons of Goliath in fighting with him, for that would bring you into too close contact with the evil which you dread, and make you seek to overcome evil with evil. You are to use the simple sling and stone of what is suited to your age and with which you are familiar—some little text of Scripture that you know by heart, some little earnest prayer that comes natural to you, some exercise of faith and trust in God. Giants are always stupid, and Philistines the stupidest of all. They have more bulk of body than of brains. It was in the forehead that Goliath received his death-wound; for

that part of him was the weakest ; and if you use the Word of God as Christ used it in His encounter with Satan in the wilderness, you will aim at the most vulnerable part of your enemy and bruise the head of the serpent.

IX

THE SHIP OF THE CHURCH

"And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship."
—LUKE v. 3.

YOUNG people are usually very fond of boats and ships, and everything connected with them. A series of sermons preached to you would manifestly be incomplete unless there were one or two referring to this most familiar subject. I wish, therefore, on this occasion to make the ship out of which Jesus preached to the multitude on the shores of the sea of Galilee the theme of our meditations. Jesus chose this strange pulpit out of necessity, but it had a wonderful suitableness. He could command His audience while He Himself was free from their pressure; and the water, acting as the best of all sounding-boards, would make His words more plainly heard. But in addition to these advantages, the ship was the most familiar symbol of the Church. The first preaching in the world was connected with a ship.

While Noah was building the ark he was telling the people why he was doing it: that a great deluge was coming upon the world, and that only by repentance could they escape from it. The ark of Noah, borne upon the universal flood, has always been used to picture the Church floating securely over the stormy waves of the world. The most sacred object in the centre of the old Egyptian temples was an ark made in the shape of a boat. So, too, the holiest object in the Jewish tabernacle and temple was called an ark, and was made like a boat. The idea was that at the creation the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters; and the highest conception which the Jewish mind could form of Jehovah was that which the Psalmist pictures, "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." And it was to represent this idea that His throne in the tabernacle and temple was an ark or boat. The lotus or sacred water-lily of the East, because it floated like a boat upon the waters, was carved and painted upon all the Egyptian temples; and the throne of Buddha, whom the people of India and China worship, is called for this reason "the lotus throne." The very names given to places of worship were in many instances derived from a ship. The boat of Menu, who was the Noah of the Hindu re-

ligion, was called *nau*. The Greeks called a temple *naos*, a ship; and we give the name of *nave*, from *navis*, a ship, to the part of the church in which the congregation assembles. Thus you see how ancient and how universal is the symbol of the Church as a ship preserving the faithful from the deluge of sin.

It seemed as if our Lord carried out this old widespread idea by making fishermen, accustomed to boats, the founders of the Christian Church. He gave them, when He called them first to be fishers of men, the sign of the miraculous draught of fishes taken into the ship to confirm their faith; and He repeated this miracle after the resurrection, when He sent them forth as apostles to preach the Gospel to every creature. The favourite emblem of the Church among the early Christians, who were sorely persecuted, was a ship covered with waves; and the most frequent of all the symbols in the Catacombs as the type of the resurrection was the ship of Jonah, no doubt on account of our Lord's comparison of Himself to that prophet.

Jesus sitting in the boat that lay on the calm waters of the sea of Galilee realised the idea of the Jews about Jehovah sitting upon the floods. His very presence in these circumstances was an acted parable. He needed for His fishing of men

a boat. He had to launch out into the deep if he was to catch a great multitude of fishes. A fisherman standing on the shore, or wading knee-deep in the water, may be successful; but he is more likely to catch a larger number of fish of larger size if he takes a boat out on the bosom of the lake or sea and fishes from it. And so the fisher of souls is more likely to be successful in the Master's work when he fishes from the boat of the Church than when he stands unaided on the shore. Jesus used the old boat which Noah built, which Moses enlarged and made more serviceable, from which Samuel and David and all the prophets proclaimed the message of God. Kings and prophets and godly men of old did what Jesus was doing now. They sat in this same boat and uttered their parables and taught the people. Jesus began His work in the Jewish Church and continued it to the end in connection with it. And His apostles followed the same plan. They began at Jerusalem, and sought everywhere the boat of a Jewish synagogue from which to cast their net. And even Paul, who was the apostle of the Gentiles, did not separate himself from the Jewish sacred places. He did not build a new ship from which to proclaim the new doctrines of grace. He used the old ship as far as it was serviceable, and strove to fulfil

his Christian work within it, preaching first to his own people the glad tidings of salvation, and leaving them only when they cast him out and would have none of his teaching. This boat is always the same. Sometimes it is painted of different colours and is differently rigged and manned by different crews. There are different sects in the Church who think that different styles of worship and creed are best; but in so far as they all love the Lord Jesus and desire to serve Him, they are all in the same boat.

When Jesus spoke to the multitude from the ship, it was His teaching alone that attracted and impressed them. They did not look at the ship, but at Jesus. They were interested not in the form and appearance of the ship, but in the parables which Jesus spoke. And so it is not the Church that ought to be the special object of interest to you, but the words of the Lord Jesus Christ which are spoken in it. Its sacraments and ordinances are the vehicles through which the instruction of Christ is imparted; and they have no value in themselves apart from the living truths of salvation which they help to communicate. The Church, therefore, must not stand between you and the living Saviour. Jesus alone is the end of your faith and the salvation of your soul.

The crew of the ship of the Church includes

old and young, each fulfilling some purpose, doing some duty, under Him who is the Captain, and stands at the helm, guiding the vessel through all the storms and difficulties of the world. You are not mere idle passengers in the ship of the Church, to be conveyed to heaven without any effort of your own. You are to work your passage. There is something for each of you to do in the Church suited to your years and to your powers. The youngest of you can not only benefit by the teaching of the Church, but also help to teach others. The youngest of you can use the Church as your boat, and help to navigate it by teaching your younger brothers and sisters, and speaking from it parables concerning the kingdom of heaven; for out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God ordains praise. Your very presence in the boat of the Church is a parable teaching careworn worldly men and women that a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and that if they do not exercise and cultivate the spirit of simplicity, trust, and love that is in little children, they cannot enter into this kingdom. It was not the mighty thoughts of which His own mind was full that Jesus told to the multitude from the boat, but the simple common things that they were prepared to hear and able to understand. He was like a teacher in an infant

school, teaching the early lessons of religion, not its larger and more advanced revelations. And so He often employs little children in teaching older people the things that belong to their peace; and it is always persons of childlike hearts and childlike faith that are most successful in teaching others.

In the Clyde there is anchored always in one of the quiet sea-lochs an old man-of-war, in which the poor boys belonging to the large towns of the west of Scotland are trained to become sailors; and in a little village of orphan homes not far from this spot there is a wooden ship full-rigged standing on the green, where orphan boys are taught the names and uses of all the parts of a ship, and made to do the work of sailors, in case any of them should in future take to that mode of life. Well, the Church is like a ship of that kind to you. You are trained in it to serve your generation, to become fishers of men, and to help to man and to steer the ship of the Church in its future course. The Church can only be successful when every one in it, from the oldest to the youngest, is doing his appointed task; and every minister must be pleased to see the children with the parents worshipping in the same pew, listening to the same instructions, and putting them to use in daily life in a manner suited to their different years and positions.

In olden times it was the fashion to make the actual fabric of a church like a ship. The ancient churches of Venice were built in this strange shape. And not far from Lisbon there is a chapel in which the kings of Portugal are buried. It is built of marble exactly like a ship about to set sail, with its pillars resembling masts, and its sails and cords carved on the walls. This strange ship, full of dead men's bones, is fixed immovably to the ground; while in sight are real ships spreading their sails to the free winds and moving swiftly over the Atlantic waves. You would not, I am sure, wish the Church to be a marble ship like that,—fixed to one place and doing no good in the world—full of dead souls. You would wish it, on the contrary, to be a real ship like that in which Jesus stood with His disciples, and of which He said after He spoke His parable, "Launch out into the deep." You would like to see it full of living souls, steering its way on an errand of blessing to all the coasts of the world. Help, then, to make the Church a living missionary ship of that kind.

It was an old-world idea that the souls of the dead were transported in a boat over water to the land of the departed. The ancient Egyptians ferried their dead across the river Nile to the burial-place on the western side towards the setting sun;

and the old pagan nations of the north placed their paradise in the isles of the west, and imagined that a mysterious boat came over the silent sea with muffled oars to carry thither the souls of the dying. And at the Japanese Festival of the Dead in July every stream is sparkling at night with little phantom boats, made of woven straw, furnished each with a tiny lamp, a store of choice food, and messages of love, carrying away the souls of the departed to the other world when the boats sink and the lamps go out. A few years ago a magnificent tomb was opened in Egypt, and in it was found the remains of a most beautiful ark or boat used for transporting the dead over the Nile; and about the same time in Norway a huge mound near Christiania was dug up, and in it was seen a complete Viking ship in which some unknown chieftain had been buried. The mound is now a mile from the sea; but the vessel had been drawn up to the shore, and then covered over with sand and turf to form a funeral hill. The craft is placed with its stem towards the sea. It was the grand imagination of the time that when the great Father should call the chieftain home, he might start from the funeral hill with his fully-appointed vessel out upon the blue ocean.

These were vain superstitions, but they contain

the kernels of great truths. You need help for the passage over the storms of life and over the dread river of death, which these ancients imagined a boat could give. The Church is designed to help you like a ship. But the Church itself cannot save you; it is like the ship into which the great draught of fishes which the disciples caught at Christ's command were brought, and which began to sink under the load. Merely being in the Church cannot save you from the flood. But if you have Christ with you in the boat—if you put your trust in Him—then you will ride securely over all the billows of time and land safely on the heavenly shore.

Let all these sacred thoughts and associations which boats and ships suggest dwell in your mind; so that whenever you see them or sail in them you may get a help to your faith from them, and they may speak to you not of common earthly uses merely, but of spiritual and eternal lessons; and you may hear, as it were, Jesus Himself uttering His parables from every boat or ship.

X

THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS

"Can the leopard change his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."—JEREMIAH xiii. 23.

YOU have all, I daresay, seen a stuffed leopard in a museum or a living one in a travelling menagerie. Perhaps you have even been to the Zoological Gardens in London, where some beautiful leopards are kept. But it is a very different thing seeing a leopard in captivity and seeing it wild in its native haunts. In its cage you cannot see the reason why its skin is covered with black spots; but in the localities where Nature has placed it you could understand at once why it was so marked. The lion, the tiger, and the leopard are three animals which very closely resemble each other in their appearance, in their general habits and in the nature of their prey. They are all gigantic cats; and when you look at them in their cages often side by side, pacing backwards and forwards restlessly, you

cannot tell why the coat of the lion should be of one uniform tawny hue, while that of the tiger is marked with long stripes, and the leopard is adorned with round spots. But if you saw them in their native places, then you would perceive that the colour of the lion's coat was like that of the sandy desert over which it roamed; and the stripes of the tiger were like the stems of the trees and the bushes, and the dry dusky jungle-grass where it lurked, so that no animal can hide itself more thoroughly; and the spots of the leopard were like the leaves of the trees and the shadows which they cast, among which it crouched in its hiding-place, without any betrayal of its presence. You would thus understand that each creature is made to resemble its surroundings so closely that it can escape the sharp watchful eye of its prey, and be able to steal upon it unperceived. Without its spots that harmonise so wonderfully with the broken foliage of the trees, the leopard aloft upon the branches would be seen by its intended victim in time to keep out of the way, and the wild beast would have difficulty in getting food, and would soon be starved out of existence.

You thus see that the spots of the leopard are a disguise, enabling it to catch its prey. The leopard as well as the lion seeks its meat from

God, and God helps it in this way to get it. It is never found in the open desert which the lion frequents, nor in the long grass jungle which is so favoured of the tiger. Only well-wooded districts suit its habits; and it is very clever in selecting spots from whence it can watch the approach of its intended prey, itself being crouched under the shade of foliage from which it is hardly distinguishable. Now most persons would say that the lion is of a uniformly tawny colour, and the tiger striped, and the leopard marked with spots, simply because they were so created. But there are curious facts that go against that view. How can we account, on that supposition, for the fact that the young lions, while they lie protected in their mother's womb, are profusely spotted and striped; and that soon after birth, while as yet they have not to seek their food, they show more or less of these markings? Does not this prove that the race of lions is descended from animals that once inhabited jungles and forests, where they wore the family livery of spots and stripes to resemble their haunts; but that having had to change their locality for some reason or other, they lost gradually the stripes and the spots, and assumed a uniform coat that resembled the monotonous desert; the original variegated form surviving only in the young, which have no need

of concealment, as their food is provided for them by their parents? You know how the famous chameleon rapidly changes its colour to suit the objects that are beside it. Well! naturalists tell us that the race of leopards acquired their spots in the same way, only by a very slow process. By degrees, as the ages went on, they became more and more like the places they frequented; the animals in each generation that bore the greatest resemblance to their haunts surviving to perpetuate the race, while the less adapted perished, owing to the difficulty of catching their prey. In this way the leopard's fur has become marked in the peculiar manner we see it to-day by a slow process of change and adaptation; and the creature is now so harmonious with its surroundings that they seem as if they were made for each other.

And is it not in the same way that human beings acquire the marks of the wild beast, the spots of sin that stain and disfigure their nature? Was it not in this way that the Jews of old, to whom Jeremiah addressed the words of the text, acquired their ungodly character by imitating the evil example of their heathen neighbours? Instead of resisting the temptations to which they were exposed, they gave way to them. They learned to tolerate and then practise the idolatries

of the nations around them. Idolatry was so common in the midst of them that it justified itself in their eyes. They thought nothing of it. They lost the sense of the purity of truth and of the holiness of God's law, and became conformed in nature and conduct to the dark doings of heathenism. They became like the heathen through associating with them, as the Ethiopian acquired his black skin from a tropical sun, and the leopard his spots from living among the leafy trees of the forest. And is it not in this way that many young people contract evil habits which corrupt and defile their whole nature by being brought up in ungodly homes and associating with bad companions? The mimic powers are strong in children, and they are apt to become like their surroundings; and if these surroundings be evil they are ready to catch the spirit and the manner of them.

It is true that all the growth of sin comes out of your own heart, which is the fount of all evil. Your sin is your own; and yet circumstances have a great power over you. Owing to your sinful nature you are easily corrupted by the wicked world. Because of the evil heart within you the evil powers without you fasten themselves upon you, and leave their marks upon you. And how sad it is to see fair young lives spotted by the

world, losing the fresh bloom of their innocence by conforming to its evil ways, and growing up wise in bad things which once they knew nothing about. The image of the text gets a deeper significance from what God said to Cain when he was guilty of the first sin outside the gates of Eden: "If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Sin is thus represented as a beast of prey ready to spring upon its victim. When you sin you call into existence something which like a wild beast is waiting to seize and make you its own. You acquire the likeness of it, and you put yourself in its power to enslave you, and to make the wrong deeds you choose freely to do into wrong practices which you cannot but choose to do. You acquire the nature and the spots of the leopard by being thus accustomed to do evil.

The prophet speaks about the almost impossibility of changing a bad character got in this way: "Can the leopard change his spots?" he says; "then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." The spots of the leopard, though they have been acquired by imitation of its surroundings, have through long ages been so ingrained and fixed that they cannot be changed. The creature itself cannot alter or remove them by any effort; they are part of its very nature; and the pattern of its skin lasts throughout the

whole life of the animal, and is communicated from parent to offspring. And so every sinner knows how very hard it is to change evil habits, to efface the stains of sin that have become dyed in the flesh. It is fatally easy to acquire what it is fatally hard to get rid of. You get so accustomed to your sin that you never feel how sinful it is. You are so like your surroundings that you have no sense of contrast or shame. You are content with yourselves, and make no effort to become better. And even when your conscience is aroused and you see the evil and the misery of your sin, the effort to root it out is painful in the extreme. De Quincey, the great author, tells us in his *Confessions* what terrible suffering he endured when he was trying to give up the practice of eating opium; and every one has heard how the poet Coleridge, when he found himself enslaved by the same habit, used to order his servant to follow him in his walks and forcibly prevent him from entering an opium shop. We have all known cases in which the grasp of habitual sin has become so deadly that it has changed a noble and generous nature into worse than a brute—which had lost all power or even desire to recover itself. No wonder the celebrated Greek flute-player of antiquity asked a double fee from the pupil who had been taught

by a bad master; for he said that while it was hard to learn the right method of playing, it was far harder to unlearn the wrong one. It is a curious thing that the word habit means a garment that you can throw off when you please, and also a way of living that may be so bound up with you that you cannot change it. It seems as if it were meant in this twofold sense to convey the great truth that the sin which at first you can lay aside with ease like a loose coat may by frequent indulgence take such a firm hold of you as to become part of your very life—as much part of yourself as the spots on the leopard's skin—and you may find it impossible to wrench yourselves free from it. The wise man says in the book of Proverbs, "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."

There is only one way in which the leopard can change his spots. It is by removing it to another locality where there are no trees, and no surroundings like those of its native place; and there it would gradually lose, in the course of a few generations, its protective spots, and become like the new circumstances. Fixed as the spots of the leopard may seem, there is no creature in reality more variable. The panther is a variety

of the leopard, whose spots are different, because it inhabits different places ; and the ounce is a kind of leopard which is found in cold and mountainous places, and therefore has a rougher fur, and its spots are not so sharply defined, and have a tendency to form stripes, while the general colour is paler. The American leopard or jaguar has got bold black streaks on its breast, and larger spots on its body, with a small mark in the middle of them ; while the puma or American lion, which is only a kind of leopard, has a uniform light tawny tint. And the remarkable thing is that the young puma displays a gradual change of fur like the lion cub ; its coat being at first marked by dark streaks and spots, which fade away into the uniform tawny hue when the animal increases in size. Thus you see that the spots of the leopard change with its changing circumstances.

And this was the way in which God endeavoured to cure the evil habits of His own people. All reforms had been on the surface only ; the evil was too deep-seated to be removed by temporary repentance. So long as they remained in the place where they were accustomed to do evil they could not learn to do well. But away from the idolatrous associations with which their native land had become tainted, a new life of truth and holiness was possible to them. God therefore

allowed them to be carried captive to Babylon ; and there in new circumstances they were to re-learn the forgotten lessons of faith and righteousness. And how often does a young man when sent away to a strange land give up the old evil habits which had been his ruin at home, and begin a new and honourable career in the new circumstances. And so what does faith in Christ do for you? It takes you out of the old world of sin, whose corruption you were in danger of catching, into a new world of righteousness. It makes heaven the atmosphere of your life. It brings the powers of the world to come to bear upon your whole being, so that you are no longer conformed to the world, but transformed in the renewing of your mind. The spiritual world is around you, stretching on to eternity, made visible by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, with all its higher standards and impulses, with spiritual purity as its law. And so beholding Christ you are changed into the same image ; so living among heavenly things your spirit catches a heavenly tone ; you get rid of your sinful habits, and are enabled to pass unspotted by the places that used to tempt you to evil. The change which it requires several generations in new circumstances to effect in the spots of the leopard, can be produced in you during your own lifetime by the power of divine

grace. For the leopard is but the creature of circumstances, and cannot help itself, but must wait till outward things act upon it; but your will can co-operate with the will of God, which is your sanctification.

But it is hard, even in this way, to get rid altogether of the traces of your sin. When I was in Norway I was greatly interested in the Norwegian ponies that drew our carioles. They are usually of a tawny yellow colour, but I noticed that many of them had a dark stripe along the back, and a few of them had dark bands across the legs. It is supposed that the Norwegian ponies are descended from the quagga, a kind of zebra which inhabits the African desert; and their ancestors were brought to this region from their original home by the Norwegian warriors who fought in the East in the Middle Ages, and brought back with them so many of its objects and customs. The zebra, as you all know, has a beautiful white skin marked with regular black stripes all over it; and these white and black markings are admirably adapted to the lights and shadows of the desert where the creature lives. In Norway the descendants of the zebra had lost all these markings, because they were no longer needed in the entirely new circumstances. But a trace of them remains in the black bands on the feet and the black

streak upon the back of some of the Norwegian ponies. And so the spots of sin in the soul are apt to leave marks behind which cannot be altogether effaced, and which reappear at times to sadden repentance and discourage good resolutions and efforts. They are not like mud thrown upon your clothes which can be washed off, or when dry can be brushed off, but like those fast dyes which cannot be removed, and last as long as the material itself. How careful then should you be not to acquire spots that are thus ineffaceable; to contract habits which you cannot get rid of; which, even when God forgives the sin of them upon your repentance, trouble you ever afterwards with their bitter memories and consequences. Ask earnestly then the Lord Jesus, by His blood which cleanseth from all sin, to wash away your crimson and scarlet sins; and by His Spirit to sanctify you wholly, and to keep you spotless amid the evils of the world; so that you may acquire by your communion with Jesus a Christlike purity and elevation of character, and from your familiarity with heavenly things the tone and colour of heaven.

XI

THE BARBERRY

"Evil communications corrupt good manners."—1 Cor. xv. 33.

There is a beautiful wild bush with bright green leaves and drooping clusters of red coral-like fruit often growing in hedges. It is called the barberry, and I daresay you have often seen it. Sometimes on the back of its leaves that look more limp and faded-like than the others, you will find a collection of pretty little round cups filled with yellow powder. This is the young stage of a fungus or mould. The wind scatters the powdery seed of these cups over the wheat fields that may happen to be on the other side of the hedge, and settling on the green stems, it grows and speedily reaches its maturity, and produces those black smutty ears which you see among the wheat. Take up one of these black ears of wheat, and you will find that it is filled with a nauseous soot-like substance, which stains your fingers and has a disagreeable smell.

It changes the nourishing material of our bread into dust and ashes, and if eaten would produce disease and death. I have often seen a large part of a wheat-field infected in this way, and I have traced the mischief to barberry bushes in a neighbouring hedge. The loss to the farmer is often very great. Indeed, so serious is this plague that in the United States of America there is a law compelling people to root out and destroy barberry bushes wherever they find them, lest they should spoil the wheat harvest.

Now this is a striking natural parable. You would never suppose that a barberry bush could cause disease in a wheat-field. The connection between the two is too remote to make you ever think of such a thing. The barberry bush belongs to a different and higher order of vegetation, and is such a bright and innocent-looking plant. You would never imagine that the beautiful little yellow cups, which are such an ornament on the under-side of the barberry leaves, when transferred to the wheat ears would produce the loathsome and deadly dark smut of the wheat disease! And yet this is the effect which we see every year in Nature. And just as certainly in the human world do evil communications corrupt good manners.

These evil communications come often from the

most unexpected quarters. They are not ugly or disagreeable at first, though they produce dreadful results. Temptation almost always comes in a beautiful form; and it is only when it is yielded to that it brings forth the black and bitter and nauseous fruit that belongs to it. How necessary then is it to watch against such temptations, and to avoid even the least appearance of evil! Your young hearts are as open to the seeds of evil example as the young wheat-fields are to the seeds of the fungus of the barberry bush. And just as the danger to the wheat-field comes from the very hedge that encloses and protects it, so the danger to young hearts often comes from the necessary restraints that hedge their life around and safeguard them. Young people dislike restraints, and are therefore apt to turn that which is meant for their good into an occasion of wrong-doing. Young people are also very imitative, and they admire courage and boldness even when shown in transgression and disobedience. And from admiration they are led to imitate the example of such lawless spirits among them, and to be drawn aside into forbidden pleasures, to become indifferent to good things, and to grow up selfish and cruel and base. How many young lives, with much promise of good in them, have been hopelessly corrupted by associating with daring

and wicked companions, and learning their evil ways! Innocent as such companions may appear, and prone as you are to look up to them, you must shun them; for they would be as deadly to you as the barberry bush is to the wheat. And you must seek the help of God to be proof against such infection. Live in the light of His smile, and the unfruitful works of darkness cannot infect you. Make Christ—who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners—your example and companion, and seek to become like Him; and the powers of wickedness will have no power over you. Cleanse your way by taking heed thereto according to God's Word, by taking God Himself with you into all your duties and enjoyments; and so you will shun the pleasures that will be injurious to your health, or that will excite greedy and selfish passions, or that will lead you into bad company or bad habits.

And as you would not wish to be corrupted by the evil communications of others, so let no evil communication come from yourselves. Your brothers and sisters and companions love you, and their love for you gives you a power and an influence over them which nothing else can give. You ought to be a healthy and health-giving hedge, guarding them by your love and your good example from all evil. No temptation should come from you

that you can prevent. It would be the cruellest thing in the world to hurt in their most vital part those whom you are bound by the most sacred ties to protect—to act the part of a treacherous barberry hedge to their tender young wheat. There is no joy like that of the elder brother who uses the power that the love of his younger brothers has given him for their highest good. While on the other hand there is no greater condemnation than that which rests upon the wrong use of that power; leading guileless, trusting ones astray by the very cords of love. God sets upon such wicked conduct the mark of Cain.

The words of the text come into the middle of a grand argument about the resurrection, and you are reminded by this that the consequences of your lives and actions here extend through death into the world to come. There is an eastern fable about a man who wished to rent for a large price a piece of land from the owner. He said that he wanted only *one* crop from the field, and when it was ripe and gathered he would give the field back to him as it was before. The proprietor, expecting a cheap bargain, allowed the stranger to lease the field for one crop. But the cunning tenant went immediately and sowed the field with acorns; and consequently long before the oak-trees in the field had grown up and

attained their prime, the owner was dead and forgotten in his grave, and the field never went back to him. Remember that the seeds of sin that you are sowing in the field of your heart and life are acorns, which will grow into a dark forest, and permanently occupy the soil, and shut out the light of heaven, and prevent any good thing from growing under their shadow. If you do not wish to be overmastered by evil lusts, and your whole life blasted by the bitter fruits which they produce, be on your guard against the first germs of evil. Dwell under the shelter of the Tree of Life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and there you will be safe.

XII

THE HEALING SHADOW

"They brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them."—ACTS v. 15.

IT was a strange thing for the people in Jerusalem to place their sick friends in the streets that they might be cured by the shadow of Peter falling upon them. Who ever heard of the shadow of a person acting the part of a physician? They had no right to suppose that any good would come of such an extraordinary plan. And they had certainly no right to make Peter cure their friends in their own way, by a device of their own, without consulting him first as to whether it would be agreeable or not—without giving him an opportunity of expressing his own mind. They reasoned that as he was a good man, and God was evidently doing wonderful things by him, his very shadow could not but have some goodness in it; just as the poor woman with the issue of blood

believed that the hem of Christ's garment had healing power. Now the remarkable thing is that, though these people were thus ignorant and superstitious, neither God nor Peter found fault with them. They believed that a magical influence proceeded from Peter's shadow; and though this was not actually the case, yet God did not withhold the cure which they expected on that account. They used Peter's shadow as a charm, and God made it to them what they wished it to be. God gave the shadow the power which it did not itself possess.

Now, why was this, do you think? It was because of the simplicity of their belief. While they had imperfect knowledge, they had perfect faith. While they had much superstition, they had much love. They believed like little children, and therefore God met them half way as it were; and while they supposed that the Apostle was a sun, the fountain-head of health and strength, able by his shadow to cure disease, God made it to them as they believed,—God as it were said to them, "Great is your faith: be it unto you even as you will." And does not God often throw His power into the means which we ourselves devise, if we have only childlike faith? Does God not often come down to our ignorance and weakness, and heal us in our own way? When we have

not the light itself, does He not make the shadow of it a healing power? There is nothing which may not be a means of grace and blessing to us, if we only put into it enough of faith and love. Little children come to church with their parents, and they are not always able to understand the meaning of the truths that are preached and the services that are carried on. But their attendance is not useless on that account. If they place themselves in their simple faith under the shadow of God's house, the blessing will assuredly not be wanting. It is not an intellectual knowledge of deep mysteries that God values, but a simple faith in Himself. And this faith the youngest of you can exercise. Believe that the shadow itself of the truths that you hear, and the services in which you are engaged, if you have not the full light of them falling upon your minds, will do you good; and God will bless even the shadow for your salvation.

The shadow of a tree or of a rock is a very delightful and refreshing thing on a burning summer day. It cools the heated frame, and imparts vigour and strength to the languid body. And if an inanimate thing can do so much good by its shadow, you would expect that the shadow of a human being would be more effectual still. I do not know that the shadow of our bodies would

help much to keep off the too hot sun from a friend, but most certainly the shadow or the influence of a good character can help others a great deal. The nature of each of us, from the youngest to the oldest, is casting a shadow of itself in our faces and conduct, in our walk and conversation ; and others will take that shadow as an example to imitate. We read in the fairy tale of a Peter Schlemihl, the man without a shadow, who frightened everybody else, and was miserable himself without this usual accompaniment of humanity. But in real life there is no such thing as a person without a shadow. We have all a shadow to our natures as we have a shadow to our bodies. They say that it was from the shadow thrown by the figure of a girl on a wall on a sunny day that the art of drawing a picture was first found out. And so from the shadows which people cast as they pass by on the way of life we can draw their portraits in our own mind ; and these portraits are wonderfully like,—much more true to life than the old silhouettes or portraits that used to be cut out of black paper.

" If people's tempers should cast shadows, what would they be ?" said a little boy once as he walked beside his companion, and saw his shadow on the road. " John's shadow would be a fist doubled up, for he is always quarrelling ; and Andrew's shadow

would be that of a dove, for he is always amiable and pleasant; and Jane's shadow would be that of the letter X, for she is as cross as two sticks; and my own shadow, what would it be?" He stopped short. He left the question unanswered, for he was afraid of what kind of shadow his own temper would cast. Now supposing you follow out the little boy's idea, and believe what is actually true, that you are throwing off impressions of what you really are all around you, and in fact can no more help doing so than you can prevent your bodies from casting real shadows on the road as you walk along; and each of you should ask himself or herself, What kind of shadow is my temper casting? It might perhaps surprise you to see yourselves as others see you; the image would not be all you would expect or wish. We sometimes hear of weak and foolish people who are said to be afraid of their own shadows; but if some people could see the shadows of their true nature,—the picture of them in the minds of those who know them better than they know themselves, —they might well be afraid of it, so ugly, so disagreeable it would appear. And if your shadow were not so perfect as you would like it to be, it would certainly do you good to see the image of your inner selves, as it would lead you to correct the faults that spoiled that picture; and thus you

would be healed, like the people in Jerusalem, by your own shadow.

The shadow of a good man must always do good. The influence that comes from one who loves God and desires to be like Jesus cannot but be beneficial. Many coming under it will be benefited both in soul and body. Seek then to walk in the light of God's countenance, in the light of the Son of righteousness, and then you cannot but cast a good shadow that will refresh and bless the world, instead of making it darker and more miserable. Seek to cast off always a kind and gentle influence in the little circle around you, that the picture of you in their minds may be a delightful one. You know *who* is said to be the shadow of a great rock in a weary land; live under His shadow, and you yourselves will be always cool and sweet, and your life will be the shadow of a great rock in a weary land to others.

He who lives in the shade does not see his own shadow; he who walks in sunshine does, and yet he is in fuller, clearer light. Living in the light of Christ you live in sunshine; but you see your own shadow of sinfulness and weakness,—you have a sense of your own darkness. And yet that shadow is humility and contrition of soul, which is pleasing to God and helpful to man,—the shadow of a good man.

XIII

THE OIL OF KINDNESS

"Pouring in oil."—LUKE x. 34.

OIL is one of the most precious things in dry hot climates. It acts against the effects of drought and heat better than anything else. Hence the plants that grow in dry situations produce in the pores of their leaves and in their fruits an abundance of oil to enable them to resist the drought. Nothing is more refreshing at the close of a long and fatiguing journey in the East than to anoint the feet and the body with olive oil. It was part of the duty of a servant to do this anointing on the arrival of a guest. It was usual also for the traveller to take with him a gourd full of oil, which he slung to his waist, in order that when fatigued by the way he might anoint himself, and thus prevent his skin from blistering under the hot sun. Whatever other article he might do without, he never forgot his gourd of oil. It contained for him what

was a necessary of life. To be deprived of the use of it was a great loss, which was done only in the time of mourning or calamity; and for an Arab of the desert to give away his oil on a journey, would be to give away the most valuable thing he had.

Thus we find that the good Samaritan in our Lord's beautiful parable was carrying with him a gourd of oil when journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho. Even though he was riding and not walking he needed this refreshment by the way,—so dry was the air, so rough the path, and so hot the sun in that dreary wilderness deep down beneath the level of the sea.

But besides its use in preventing the blistering of the skin during travelling, oil was also much used among eastern people in curing wounds. It formed a kind of artificial skin over the raw surface coming between it and the biting air, and thus helped to heal it more rapidly. The good Samaritan found his gourd of oil most useful for this purpose when he came across the sorely wounded Jew in the way. He poured into his wounds the soothing and healing oil. He sacrificed his own comfort for the sake of the greater necessities of his poor suffering fellow-creature,—a sacrifice which you will be better able to understand when you remember what I said about the

little store of oil being so necessary to the traveller himself.

But there is still another use for oil, which was long known indeed and passed as a common proverb, but which is now only coming to be taken advantage of practically; I mean its use in smoothing troubled waters. A thin film of it spread over the stormiest sea prevents the waves from breaking. When the Esquimaux wants to take his family across a rough arm of the sea in the frail woman's boat, he goes before them in his own canoe, from the stern of which he trails a punctured skin full of oil, which oozes out and stills the waves, and insures a smooth passage for them. There are many instances of late years of ships being saved by the application of oil to the tempestuous seas that threatened to overwhelm them. We read in the newspapers the other day of a steamship which broke her shaft when three-fourths of her way across the Atlantic. Another steamship of the same Company happened to come alongside, and towed her by a long hawser; a tremendous gale then sprang up, and it was feared that the disabled ship would require to be abandoned. As a last resort a can of oil, with a small hole in the bottom, was sent over the stern of the guiding ship and dropped its contents into the sea. The effect was magical. The dangerous waves ceased to break over the

bows of the ship in tow; the tension on the cable was immediately relieved; and in spite of continuous storms the disabled ship was brought to New York—a distance of 750 miles—in safety. A comparatively small quantity of oil helped to produce this most wonderful effect; such is the extreme power of expanding and widening itself which oil possesses when floating on water. By such experiments the importance of oil in lessening the dreadful risks of the sea has been so satisfactorily proved, that ere long every vessel, I have no doubt, will be compelled by Government to carry a store of it.

Thus we see how useful oil is to the traveller in the eastern desert, and to the sailor on the stormy sea, and to the medical man in the treatment of wounds at home. And I wish you, my dear young friends, to learn a lesson from the uses of oil in the conduct of your own life. Children are said by the Psalmist, if we translate the words as they are in the original, to be a stronghold for troubled men. When our trust in grown-up men and women, because of their selfishness and deceitfulness, is disappointed; when our trust in ourselves, because of our frequent failures, leaves us, we betake ourselves to children, whose innocence, simplicity, and love reassure us, and bring back our faith in human nature and our

trust in God. You have thus a great power. You renew the youth of the world. You bring courage, cheerfulness, hope, love, to hearts that are growing weary and sad, or that might grow weary and sad and selfish but for you. You do this without meaning it by your freshness and youthfulness, and by the love and hope you excite.

But God wants you to do this intentionally; for you are each able to think and to act. You did not come into the world that you might please yourselves merely, but that you might brighten the lives of all dear to you and make the world better. And one way in which you can do this is by carrying with you every day and wherever you go, like the good Samaritan, a flask of oil, to pour the healing drops into the wounds of your fellow-creatures, to calm the stormy sea of passion and strife, and to refresh those who are weary and way-worn in the pilgrimage of life. The youngest of you can do this. You say, 'I am a little pilgrim;" and this indeed you are, for you are journeying through a wilderness, you are sailing over a rough sea. Carry then with you for the necessities of the journey or the voyage the good Samaritan's flask of oil—the sweet graciousness and kindness of a loving heart always ready to do good. You can get this oil from Him who gave to the olive berry growing on the driest and most barren rock

its useful oil, and who gets one of His own most precious names, *Christ*, from the fact that He was anointed with God's oil of consecration to live and die not for Himself but for the world. How perfectly did He act the part of the good Samaritan! How He refreshed the weary and way-worn ; how He healed the sick and wounded with the oil of His grace! He ever poured oil upon the troubled waters of strife. He ever spoke the soft word that turneth away wrath; He ever gave the pitying look that melted and subdued the hardest heart. He was ever tender and considerate and thoughtful of others, and forgetful of Himself. When reviled, He reviled not again. He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. He loved His enemies and prayed for them that despitefully used Him and persecuted Him. He was Himself a living oil-bottle, as it were, filled with costly spikenard, the sweet savour of which God smelled with delight, and which was ever employed in doing good. This is the example you are to imitate. This is the spirit that you are to cherish. Seek to know and love Christ better. Say to Him, "Give us of your oil." Get this unction from the Holy One, which He offers to you without money and without price,—this blessed charm, which will make you indeed the Lord's anointed ones, and which will enable you to anoint the weary and

wounded you meet with by the way with the oil of gladness.

You will find plenty of uses for this precious oil, and abundance of opportunities for using it. You need not go from home, like the Samaritan, to find those who require it. I have known girls who disliked making themselves useful at home, and who thought that it would be a far nobler thing to go out as hospital nurses, to do for strangers what they ought to do for their own flesh and blood. And I have known boys who were far more polite and kind to persons whom they knew nothing about than to their own brothers and sisters. This surely is not right. And every young person should be reminded that the best sphere of duty is always at home—the one that yields the finest training and the greatest happiness. Use your oil bottle at home then to make things smooth and pleasant there. Act like the Esquimaux when conveying his family over the rough sea. Pour your oil upon the quarrels and disputes that are so apt often to arise among those who live so closely together. You can help to cheer your father's heart with a loving smile when he comes back at night tired and cast down after his day's work; to make your mother forget her cares and anxieties by your sympathy and willingness to spare her trouble, or to assist her as far as you can; to

smooth and allay the little difficulties and tempers of your brothers and sisters by studying how to please them rather than yourselves. How good a thing it is, says the Psalmist, to see a family living together in that way in unity and love! "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments."

But you must not keep your oil only for your own home. You must take it with you abroad; and, like the Arab, never leave it behind you, whatever else you leave. You can with the oil of grace which Jesus gives you do much to comfort sad and weary and wounded ones in the world. You can speak a kind word as well as give an alms to the poor; you can visit some one whose house is dreary and lonely, and to whom the very sight of your smiling face and the warm grasp of your hand, children as you are, would be like drops of oil, spreading like a sweet savour all through the place and flowing with cheering effect into the desolate heart. There are persons who are sorely wounded by the cruelties of the world; who are almost slain by the poison of bad company, or who suffer dreadfully from a bad spirit pervading the family life—the evil temper of some member of it. These as much as the poor and the diseased need your compassion and your help. Seek as much as in you

lies to cheer them and guide them by your loving sympathy and your tender words. You do not know where and when a few drops from your oil flask may be eagerly desired and thankfully received. The cold, hard, pitiless world is continually pouring its vinegar and nitre into the wounded hearts and lives of human beings, irritating and inflaming them. Be it yours to pour into them as often as you can the oil of loving words and kind deeds and looks. The world's sea is ever a rough one for timid souls; be it yours to trail behind you the oil of peace, to make a smooth passage for them. The world is a dreary parched wilderness for every pilgrim. Be it yours to dip your foot, like Asher, in oil, to make plain smooth paths for your feet, and to carry the riches of grace wherever you tread. And if you do this, you may lose your own oil, like the good Samaritan, and not receive in return a single drop from others; but as you follow Christ, the Anointed One, in doing good like Him, you will find the fatness which His paths drop; and you will feel inwardly refreshed, as if you had been anointed with the costliest spikenard from head to foot.

XIV

PERFUMED GARMENTS

"All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad."—PSALMS xlv. 8.

A PERSIAN poet tells us that one day a man picked up a piece of clay that had a delightful smell. He said to it, "What art thou; art thou musk?"—"No; I am only a bit of humble clay, but I have been near a beautiful rose, and it has given me its own sweet scent." Do you know how they manufacture perfumes? In a mountain town in the south of Europe the people gather various kinds of sweet-scented flowers, and they lay them between pieces of slate, smeared with fat. The fat absorbs all the fragrance of the flowers, which are then taken away, and fresh ones put in their place. And this process goes on until the fat on the plates is charged to the full with the scent of the flowers. The highly-perfumed fat is then scraped off and put into

spirits of wine, where it melts, and is easily removed, leaving its fragrance behind in the spirits. In this way you get those delightful bottles of scent which young people are fond of sprinkling upon their handkerchiefs. It was in this way that the costly spikenard with which Mary of Bethany anointed the feet of Jesus was made. The fat has no fragrance of its own, but it has the property of absorbing and retaining the fragrance of the flowers that have been beside it, and thus it becomes itself fragrant.

It was in a way somewhat like this that the garments of the king described in the text smelt of the myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, that were burnt as incense in the ivory palace out of which he came. It was his marriage-day, and these sacred aromatic woods which were brought from Arabia, and were supposed to have grown in the garden of Eden, were used in connection with the religious services. They filled the magnificent room, whose walls were inlaid in beautiful patterns of black and white with ivory and ebony, with their perfumed smoke; and consequently the king, when he came out, had his robes saturated with the delightful fragrance, and every one knew where he had been and what he had been doing. Nothing adheres so much to clothes as certain kinds of smell. When I was a boy there were

two ways by which I could get to school—one by the open highway, and the other through a wood full of wild geraniums—a weed with a little pink flower, whose leaves have a curious musky smell. My clothes, when I took the short cut by the wood and brushed through the geraniums, caught and kept their peculiar smell; and my companions knew at once when I reached school by which way I had come. I cannot feel the smell of this common weed for a moment without that wood and all those happy memories of my school life coming back with the utmost vividness to my mind. The favourite perfume of Napoleon Buonaparte was that of aloes, which were therefore frequently burnt in a censer in his private room; and when he appeared in public every one felt the penetrating odour that exhaled from his garments. When you enter a Roman Catholic church you find usually the air loaded with the heavy incense, and you take out the smell of it upon you wherever you go.

Now does not this quality which perfumes have of communicating themselves to the persons and objects in contact with them teach you an important lesson? Is it not a striking illustration of the blessed effect of being with Jesus? The ivory palace is for you the place where the throne of grace is. There the altar of incense sends

forth its smoke of prayer; and the King of Kings is present to hear and answer every petition, and bless all who wait upon Him. Moses showed that he had been with God on the holy mount by the light of heaven which he took down with him shining on his face into the camp of Israel. Do you in like manner show that you have been in the secret place of the Most High—in prayer and fellowship with Jesus—by your garments smelling of the fragrance of holiness, so that all who come near you can feel that you have been with Jesus? You are like the lump of clay in the fable, or the piece of fat in the hands of the perfume-manufacturer. You have no fragrance of your own; but you can get the odour of sanctity by living always as near as possible to the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley—to Him whose name is as ointment poured forth. You will become Christlike by constant communion with Him. You will become pure and meek, kind and loving, as He was. His perfume will go out to you, and sweeten all your words and actions, so that every one will like to be in your company. They will feel your smell like the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed. A character will be yours such as will make up for lack of great talent if you do not possess it. By your consistency of conduct and charm of

manner, you may do more good than others with great wealth or great wisdom.

Why do we love the violet and the mignonette more than other flowers? They have no great beauty of form or colour. Many other flowers far surpass them in brightness and grace. Is it not because of the delicious fragrance which they shed from their meek and lowly blossoms? And so it is the sweet perfume of gentleness and kindness which you get from Him who is meek and lowly that will make your company more prized than that of others who may have more conspicuous attractions and influence. It was said of Christ on one occasion that He could not be hid. He wished to be unknown in the place to which He had come; but like the smell of some old oriental perfume, which comes out through the vial and the wrappings, every one knew that He was there from the fragrance that came from His presence. And so, if you are like Jesus, and keep ever near Him, you cannot be hid, however much you may desire it. You will be like the violet which hides itself among the moss and the leaves, and yet is betrayed by its own sweet scent. You will be made known by the sweet perfume that exhales from your spirit and sanctifies every scene, and makes the most trivial action pleasant. A squire in one of the midland counties of England formed

a garden, in which there was nothing but sweet-scented leaves and flowers. He was blind, and the sense of smell was the only one by which he could enjoy the delights of his garden. There are many who are blind to other qualities in a person, accomplishments and intellectual powers, but they feel the fragrance of goodness. Let it be yours to make your religion felt even by the sense of smell, as the blind and deaf could join in the service of the old Jewish temple when the clouds of incense arose.

The gift that was brought to the infant Jesus by the wise men of the East was a store of perfume of myrrh and frankincense. It was the most precious and suitable gift they could offer. It was brought in honour of Him who, though the King of Kings, had humbled Himself to become a little child in order that we might become the sons of God. Mary of Bethany anointed the feet of Jesus with her fragrant spikenard; and she did this, as Jesus told her, in honour of His burial. And so the most precious and suitable gift you can bring to Jesus is the perfume of a life whose meekness and humility have been caught from His own humbling of Himself for your sakes, and whose self-sacrificing love has been produced by the virtue of His own atoning death for you! The perfume you have got from

Him is the best incense, the best offering you can give back to Him. It will be to Him a sweet-smelling savour.

But not only will the sweet fragrance your life catches from the incense in the ivory palace of prayer, from communion with Jesus, the Rose of Sharon, be pleasant to yourselves and others ; it will also exercise a preserving influence over you. It is well known that sweet-smelling flowers and aromatic trees and shrubs purify the air from fever and ague. In the neighbourhood of Rome it is deadly to breathe the infected air of the wide plains around the city. But by planting gum-trees in these desolate places, the aromatic breath of their leaves makes the air wholesome. And so, having your clothes, as it were, smelling sweet of the ivory palaces, you will be preserved from the moral evils of the world. You will not catch infection from the plagues and the fevers of the soul that hurt and destroy so many young people. You remember how Aaron took the censer, and by the cloud of incense that arose from it, put a fragrant barrier between the Israelites and the plague that had slain thousands of them because of their rebellion, so that the plague ceased, and they were safe. You remember how Balaam attempted to curse the Israelites ; but, encamped as they were like trees of lign-aloes which the

Lord had planted around the tabernacle, where the ceaseless sweet savour of the altar of incense protected them, no curse could prevail against them. And so you will be safe from every plague and every curse if you are sheltered under the sweet savour of the Lamb slain for you. You will enjoy the saving health of God's countenance wherever you are. Your access into the holiest will always be open, and the sweet savour of the name of Jesus will be ever your fragrant memorial in the presence of God. You will go out of that ivory palace with your garments smelling of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, to sweeten the bitter or insipid world with your presence and your work. You will, like a fragrant plant in an unhealthy place, help to purify and invigorate the air of the world, and diffuse a wholesome and healing influence all around you. And when old age comes upon you, your life will only become more fragrant in goodness, like woodruff leaves that give forth a sweeter scent as they wither. And when at last you die, your actions will smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

XV

CURIOSITY

"I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."—EXODUS iii. 3.

WHAT Moses saw on the hill was apparently no uncommon sight in such a wild and lonely place. It looked like an ordinary bush burning, and Moses might have said to himself, "Oh! it is only the fire that some shepherd has made to warm himself in the chill afternoon air. He has struck a spark and kindled one of the withered acacia bushes which grow so plentifully on the hill;" or he might have thought that it was only the red glow of the setting sun shining from a granite rock full on the bush, such as he had often seen in the desert, only a little brighter than usual. At all events he might have said to himself, "I have nothing to do with it. It is merely some curious natural sight, and does not concern my business as a shepherd. I will not trouble myself to go and see what it is. It is

not worth my while." And so he might have dismissed the thing from his mind as unworthy of any further consideration.

But Moses was a thoughtful man; and his lonely life in the desert made him cultivate his senses and his faculties. You know how skilful persons in wild uninhabited places, left to their own resources, become in interpreting the signs of Nature and the traces of man. A foot-print on the sand will tell an Arab not only whether it was a man or a woman who made it, a young or old person, but even whether the person was tired and worn-out or fresh and active. A branch broken off from a bush will indicate to an Australian or Indian savage the time when the person who did it passed by, in what direction he was going, and in what mood of mind he was. And so Moses, by the discipline of the lonely wilderness, learnt to interpret the signs of the desert. And therefore he saw that while the bush was an ordinary bush belonging to the place, and the fire like an ordinary shepherd's watch-fire, there was something peculiar about it, and that something fixed his eye and puzzled his mind. It ought, if it had been a common fire in a withered acacia bush, to have gone up in a bright crackling blaze for a minute or two, and then gone out, as you have seen

many a time a dry withered thorn-bush on our own hillsides blazing up when set on fire, and then in a very short time dying down. But this extraordinary bush continued to blaze on as brightly as at the beginning, and he could not see any hand feeding it with new material, or any dark interval of smoke before the fire got the victory over the new fuel put on. His curiosity was aroused. He left his sheep, and he drew nearer to find out the cause of this wonderful sight. And he was rewarded in a wonderful way. He found that the bush was aflame with God's glory—was the altar on which the fire of heaven which God Himself had kindled burnt; and he got a revelation of God from the midst of it, and instructions in an audible voice as to what he was to do for the redemption of his people Israel.

Now I have chosen this interesting incident to teach you a lesson on the importance of cultivating habits of observation. If Moses had not noticed or paid any attention to the burning bush; if he had gone on with his shepherd work and did not take the trouble to find out what was the cause of the wonderful appearance which the bush presented, then the whole of his own life would have been quite different, and the history of the Israelites would have been quite different.

Moses would have continued a shepherd all his days, unknown and forgotten; and the Israelites would have continued slaves in Egypt, and would finally have perished as a nation under the terrible bondage of their oppressors. God put Moses to the test whether he would attend to His revelation or not. He did not appear to him in any extraordinary vision in the air, lighting up all the hill with His glory, so that Moses could not but be struck with awe and astonishment. God did not force Himself upon the notice of Moses; He did not compel his attention. He made use of the ordinary things of the desert to make Himself known thereby. And all this was to try Moses whether he would attend or not. And the keenness with which Moses noticed the one point of difference between this strange fire and an ordinary fire, his thoughtful observation, the trouble he took to leave his work and go nearer in order to find out the cause; all this was a preparation in Moses himself to receive what God was preparing to communicate to him,—a discipline of self-help which led to his finding God in the bush and becoming the leader of God's people.

Now this incident is just a type of what happens often in life. If you will get into the constant habit of keeping your eyes and ears open wherever you are, you will notice things, and find

out the reasons of things, that in their own way will be as instructive and important in their bearing upon your life as the burning bush was in the case of Moses. What you do at first with an effort and with a clear intention, you will by and by be able to do unconsciously; your perceptive faculties will be quickened, and your eyes and ears will become channels through which, almost without knowing it, you will take in instruction from all the wonderful world about you. The burning bush was out of the line of Moses' business, but he wanted to know about it all the same. And so many things may seem to be out of your business, but you ought to concern yourselves about them for all that. Many people have eyes and ears only for their daily work, for the things by which they earn their bread. They care for nothing beyond the little sphere in which they live, and to the level of which they dwarf their own minds. But it was through studying what was outside his own calling that the way was prepared for the great promotion of Moses. And so you may get on in life, as many a one has done, by knowing something beyond your own occupation. You are an immortal soul preparing for eternity, and everything in God's world should interest you. If it has no direct use in your daily calling, it has an educative use

in expanding and furnishing your mind, and helping to make for you a full and earnest life. It is astonishing how little many people see or care to know in a world teeming with wonders. They go about in the midst of the most interesting things with their eyes half shut and their minds wholly unawakened, seeing and hearing nothing that causes them to say, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight." They will not take the least trouble to find out the meaning of God's great wonders.

Great results followed from Moses' study of the desert bush. And so great results have followed the study of common things in ordinary life. It was the noticing of something uncommon in a common-looking object that turned the fortune of Moses and changed the future of Israel. And so it is the noticing of something uncommon about common things that leads to many a wonderful discovery or invention. Millions of men saw an apple fall, and thought only whether it was green or ripe; Newton saw it and discovered the system of the universe. Millions saw the steam in a kettle lifting the lid, but Watt saw it and invented the steam engine which has revolutionised the world. Millions saw a lamp swinging in the air, but Galileo noticed the swinging of the chandelier hanging from the roof

of the Cathedral of Pisa, and it suggested to him the pendulum by which our time is measured. You may not be able to observe the uncommon element in common things to such purpose as these great men; such great results may not follow your keenest observations of ordinary things. But you can at least make your own walks more interesting, and get more pleasure and instruction out of life. There is no business in which the habit of observation will not be useful to yourselves and others, and give the person who has it great advantage over those who lack it.

The knowledge you acquire at first hand, not from books, or the hearsay of others, but from the proper use of your own eyes and ears, will be useful to you in many ways. I remember once being on a great level moorland surrounded by a dense mist. I did not know where to turn. Suddenly I saw before me some thistle-down floating in the air. I knew that it had come from cultivated land, for the thistle never grows where the plough has never been. Following in the direction of the wind that had blown the thistle-down to me, I came in a short time to the fields and homes of men. Here, you see, my observation of the nature of a plant prevented me from being lost on a hill. The diligent cultivation of the habit of noticing little things, and

especially differences in little things, will save you from many of the pains and losses which others have to pass through in getting their knowledge by experience. A friend of mine was once nearly poisoned by eating a deadly mushroom which he thought resembled a wholesome one. I never tasted that mushroom, but I knew by observation the points of difference which distinguished it, and was thus saved from making any rash experiment upon it. Thus it is always better to learn a thing by observation than by experience, especially if it is something that will hurt you. You have a far better hold, too, of a fact if you have learned it for yourself than if you had been told it by others or picked it up from a book. The maid-servant of the learned historian Mézérai one day entered his study and asked him for a burning coal from the grate, with which to rekindle the kitchen fire, that had gone out in her absence. "But you haven't brought a shovel," he said. "I don't need one," said she, and immediately proceeded to fill her hands with the white ashes below the grate, and then put a live coal on the top, which she was thus able to carry away in safety. The philosopher was amazed. He knew well enough that ashes were a bad conductor of heat, as a thing that he had learned from books, but the fact had never been so vividly realised by

him before; but the servant girl knew it as a fact of observation and experience, and it was useful to her in her everyday life. And so it is always best if possible to find out things for ourselves.

But it is in regard to religious things that I would have you cultivate the habit of observation. The things that are to be learned in the spiritual world are far more interesting and important than the things of the natural world; and far greater results come from knowing them. There are great sights in this spiritual world—wonders of redeeming love; but they will appear to you under the aspect of common familiar things, with nothing very wonderful about them at first sight. It is only when you study them, approach nearer to them by observation and meditation, that you find out how great and wonderful they are. And God is presenting to you His great things in forms so simple and easy and familiar that a child may understand them, in order to test you whether you will turn aside and find out for yourselves their greatness, or overlook them with indifference because they are so common. The Bible looks like any ordinary book which you may read; the sacrament of the Lord's Supper appears a simple meal of bread and wine; the Cross of Christ seems only a painful and shameful tragedy; Jesus Himself is without form or comeliness.

And the world too often sees nothing attractive or wonderful in these things, and does not trouble itself to leave the common business of life to draw near and examine them more closely. And God does not reveal Himself to those who will not go an inch out of their own way to see His power and hear His voice. But if you have a holy curiosity ; if you see something out of the common, something strange which excites your interest and your desire to know more in the common things of religion, and if you act as Moses did, then you will be rewarded as Moses was. The Bible will be to you God's voice speaking out of every page ; the Lord's Supper will be the point of contact between your faith and the fulness of Jesus ; the Cross of Christ will be the atonement for your sin ; and Jesus Himself will be all your salvation and all your desire.

What you need, then, is not a revelation from heaven in great and high and unusual things, but eyes to see the revelation which God has already given to you beside your door in common things. What you need is to be roused out of laziness and indifference, and to be made to take trouble to think and see and find out the meanings of things for yourselves. And if you turn aside from things that are far less important, and take the trouble to inquire about the things that belong to

your everlasting peace, then everything in Nature will lead you up to God. You will find Him in every bush. You will find everywhere flowers among the grass, heavenly revelations in common things. You will be able to use ordinary things in the sacred service of your Lord ; and every bit of knowledge you pick up can be turned to good account in teaching others the way of salvation. Every spot will be to you holy ground ; and you will be fitted to become the leaders of your people when you grow up.

XVI

CONSIDERATION

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained."—PSALMS viii. 3.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."—MATTHEW vi. 28.

"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself."—HEBREWS xii. 3.

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."—ISAIAH i. 3.

I AM going to speak to you for a little about the word "consider," and what things you ought to consider. The word consider means more than merely to look at. It means thoughtful study. And that is what you ought to give to everything that is worthy of consideration—not a mere hasty careless glance, but deep, reverent, careful thought. The Bible tells you about three things which you ought specially to consider; the first is the stars, the second the flowers, and the third the Cross.

The Psalmist said, "When I *consider* thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the

stars, which thou hast ordained." You are to begin with the greatest thing. You are to consider first the stars. The study of the heavens was the first study. The East was the place where astronomy had its origin. The heavens there are much clearer than ours, and the stars more brilliant. They look as if they were hung down from the roof of the sky like silver lamps. The people had employments, such as watching sheep, which kept them out all night; and one of the ways in which they beguiled the tedium of watching was the contemplation of the midnight heavens. The Chaldeans were the first astronomers. Abraham was a star-gazer. The wise men of the East were guided by their study of the heavens—by a star that appeared to them—to the feet of Jesus. God wants you to look upward. That is the reason why, unlike the animals, you stand erect, and have your face turned, not to the earth but to the sky. Look upwards then, and consider the heavens, that you may have great thoughts of God and of His creation, that your mind may be expanded and enlarged.

The stars that look to you as if they were all on the same line, are vast distances away from each other, and the light would take thousands of years to go from the one to the other. All the stars that you see belong to one firmament; and there are

innumerable firmaments beyond, which appear to your eye as mere faint specks or clouds of luminous vapour no bigger than a child's hand, on the verge of space, and which, if you approached them near enough, after travelling millions of years, would open up into far grander firmaments of stars than you see on the finest winter night on earth. How great must be the God who made and upholds all that tremendous universe of stars—each a world far bigger than our own! Consider the wonderful calmness of the starry realm, shining in passionless serenity high above all the changes and disturbances of the world; and may the sight calm you when you are vexed, or angry, or troubled in spirit. Consider the sublime order of these starry heavens, the smallest orb performing its revolutions with the utmost regularity; and seek to make your own little life as orderly and regular and as subject to God's holy law.

When David looked up into the heavens, he was appalled by the spectacle. He seemed to shrink into insignificance. He could not believe that such a great God could care for such a humble creature as himself. But the smallest child is in reality greater than the most magnificent star. The child has what the star has not—consciousness of itself, the power of freedom, to do what it likes, to say "No" even to God. The child can study

the star and know all about it. You have therefore the feeling that, however insignificant you may seem when looking up to the glory of the starry heavens, you are actually greater than these heavens. Consider then that He who sustains all that vast multitude of stars, upholds all the little interests of your human life.

The next thing you have to consider is the lilies, how they grow. In looking up to the heavens you are apt to look down upon the flowers, to trample them under foot as beneath your notice. But what the stars are in the blue sky the flowers are on the green earth. The stars are the flowers of the sky, and the flowers are the stars of the earth. The flowers revolve in the orbits of the seasons, as the stars revolve in the orbits of the heavens. The two are related to and made for each other. The flowers are timed to the motions of the heavens. They open and close, bloom and fade, according to the revolutions of the stars. The daisy follows the sun all day with its open eye, and closes its bloom when the sun sets, to open it again when the sun rises. Small and insignificant as a lily may look, the whole earth from pole to pole and from centre to circumference has been weighed in the balance, in order that it may hang its blossom in the right way to ripen its seed.

Among the first words which Jesus uttered when He began His public ministry were the words, "Consider the lilies." More than any other teacher He called attention to common things, and things near at hand, which on that account are apt to be overlooked or despised. For human beings have a natural craving for that which is mysterious and far-fetched, and think that when God speaks to them He will tell them something very grand that they had never known before. But Jesus, though He came from heaven, told them about the things of earth, the things that were familiar to them, but the wonder of which their familiarity had taken away. He told them that the kingdom of heaven was like the common things of their everyday life. If they considered the lilies how they grew, they should find that the simplest thing was full of the unsearchable God. Jesus came to reveal the Father, and He found the Father everywhere. David saw the everlasting God in the heavens, the moon, and the stars; Jesus saw the same everlasting God in the fowls of the sky and in the lilies of the field. Of every grass blade and drooping blossom Jesus said, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones."

Consider the lilies. Christ bids you sit down before them like children before their lesson-book, and spell and construe as much of the

lesson as you can; for there is quite enough in it to engage your whole attention and overwhelm you with mystery. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth, but the word of God that speaks to you through these humble perishing things liveth and endureth for ever. Consider the lilies, and associate little things with God. The very fact that the lilies are trifles brings the God who gave them nearer to your hearts. Strangers and mere acquaintances offer large and important gifts; it is only members of the family and the dearest friends who approach near enough to offer trifles. In these lilies of the field you have sweet proofs before your eyes of God's infinite condescension and love. You have a delightful assurance that you have a Father in heaven, and that you can approach Him at all times with filial confidence, and address Him with the familiarity and frankness of little children, knowing that He will take the deepest interest in your smallest things. Consider the lilies, and look on things beneath as well as on things above. The angel said to the disciples when they were looking up at their ascended Lord, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" Their work and their interest were on earth. The Saviour they had lost in the heavens they would find in the streets of Jerusalem. And

so God says to you, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" as if God were only to be found there. Look for God when you look at the earth, for the very stones cry out, "Hosanna!"

But most of all you are to consider Him who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. Jesus unites heaven and earth, the stars and the flowers, the fulness of the Godhead and the fulness of the creature. He made all things, and in Him all things consist. He is all that the stars mean; for He is the sun of righteousness and the bright and morning star. He is all that the flowers mean; for He is the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley. Therefore, if you are commanded to consider the heavens and the lilies, much more are you commanded to consider Him who gave them all their glory and beauty, and who in Himself is infinitely more glorious and beautiful. But it is not His greatness that you are asked to consider so much as His lowliness. Jacob was lost in wonder when he saw God at the top of the ladder in a dream; but you see Him at the foot of the ladder in reality. Moses gazed in amazement upon the burning bush; but all which that bush typified Christ endured.

Well may you consider the Son of God in His sorrow and suffering; for it is the most amazing spectacle which the universe presents.

Angels desire to look into these things. Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." Consider Him as bearing all the suffering and shame that you might not have to bear them. For your safety and blessedness the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person hung upon the cross, a spectacle of woe. It is not enough to consider the heavens and the lilies, no matter how high the thoughts and pure the feelings they inspire; for that is mere natural religion, suitable to Adam in the garden of Eden before he fell. But you belong to a fallen world, and you are sinners, and therefore you have to consider how your sin is to be taken away, and how you, as sinful beings, may be enabled to worship God, and be accepted by Him. The Cross of Christ tells you the way; tells you how God can be just, and the justifier of the ungodly who believe in Jesus. And therefore, while as natural beings needing instruction, you consider the stars how they shine and the lilies how they grow; as spiritual beings, full of guilt, needing the great salvation, you have to behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, and to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, your Lord.

But how few, young or old, consider the stars, or the lilies, or the Cross. It was a heavy charge that was brought by God against His ancient people, for whom He had done so much: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not *consider*." And that charge can be brought against many of us to-day. Why is it that you do not consider? Not surely for want of opportunity. There are the heavens which David considered, still unchanged, over your heads; there are the lilies which Christ bade His disciples consider, still blooming beside your path; there is the Cross, regarding which the invitation goes forth in every sermon, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." The true reason is because inconsiderateness saves trouble. Most people do not like to consider, to think deeply about anything. They prefer to have all their thinking done for them. They are also afraid of what should be revealed to them if they considered, and of what they should have to be and to do in consequence. If you consider the stars, their calmness will shame your passion, their order your disorder, their greatness your petty meanness. If you consider the lilies, their purity will condemn your impurity, their beauty your ugliness, their simple trust your faithlessness. If you

consider the Cross, it will convince you of sin and righteousness and judgment, it will reveal your lost condition, and it will lead you to crucify the flesh with all its lusts and affections. And you do not like a considering that produces effects and leads to results like these. You prefer to be let alone. But without consideration no one can be wise—no one can be good. How much do you lose, by not considering the stars and the lilies, that would enrich and ennoble your life, and be the source of the greatest interest and enjoyment to you. And by not considering the Cross you die in your sins, like the serpent-bitten Israelites, who refused to look at the brazen serpent lifted up by Moses for their cure. Cultivate then a spirit of inquiry. Try to get at the meaning and the reality of things. Be earnest and curious about the things that belong to your peace. Consider first the Cross, that you may be wise unto salvation; and then the stars, that you may have adequate ideas of the greatness of God; and then the lilies, that you may realise the blessed truth that though God be high, yet He respects all those that be lowly,—that He who counts the number of the stars, and names them every one, binds up the broken heart and healeth every painful wound.

XVII

THE FATHER OF THE RAIN

"Hath the rain a father?"—JOB xxxviii. 28.

MANY of our texts are so familiar that they do not impress us; and when we say some commonplace things about them, which everybody knows, our discourse seems like what a farmer once said regarding raking with the teeth upwards. You know that in haymaking you have to use the rake with the teeth downwards if you are to gather with it the scattered hay; but if you use the rake with the teeth upwards, you will only smooth the ground, and pass over the hay without collecting it. So I like an out-of-the-way text, for it makes one think, and it puts often a new meaning into an old truth. It is like raking with the teeth downwards; it catches the ear, and gathers together the wandering thoughts, and points down to the heart and the conscience, and thus does its work effectually. It is long remembered, and

perhaps comes back to one when it is most needed, in a time of difficulty or trouble. Especially is it necessary to choose an out-of-the-way text if one has to speak upon a very common and familiar subject. And you know that in our country there is no subject so common and familiar as rain. It is the most frequent topic of conversation amongst us, and we think we know already all that can be said about it. I wish, therefore, to take it out of this common-place position, and, if possible, to invest it with a new interest in our eyes.

The form of the text is cast in a peculiarly eastern mould. It means literally, "Who made the rain?" But orientals have a peculiar way of speaking of things as if they were persons, and were related to each other. They trace everything back to a personal source. To own a thing, or to cause a thing to take place, is to be the father of it; and a big thing is said to be the father of a little thing of the same kind. Thus, for instance, a gun would be called by an Arab the father of a pistol, and a man with long hair the father of hair. This seems a very strange way of speaking to us; but it is a peculiarity of all primitive, simple-minded people. And do you not think it is a truer way of accounting for the origin of things by tracing them to a personal source, than by saying, as is the common modern way

amongst us, that they are caused by dead laws and forces? You know the Greeks of old put everything in nature under charge of a divinity. The air, the winds, and the waters were peopled with spiritual beings, and every operation of the natural world was under their control. Æolus was the god who directed the winds to blow or cease. The rain was under the charge of the Horæ, who watched the gates of heaven, now closing them with thick clouds, and now clearing the clouds away. Iris was the goddess who brought the beautiful rainbow out of the dark rain, and formed with it a bridge between earth and heaven; and Aurora was the goddess by whose power the dawn crimsoned the east and ushered in each new day. We in these enlightened days call these divinities creations of the poetic dream. And yet they were not altogether the inventions of human imagination. They were the shadows of something real, something purer than themselves; the efforts of those who had no revelation of God to find out the great First Cause of all things.

And does not this putting by the Greek poets of the things and operations of nature under the care of some divine being, bring us nearer in thought to the living personal Source of all things—the great Father who made the universe, ourselves, and everything we see? Is it not the

feeling of children that nature is not dead, but living; that there is a Presence speaking to them everywhere in the sounds and manifesting itself in the movements of the natural world? As we grow older we lose the faith of our childhood, and we account for everything we see by scientific laws and forces. But the idea that children have of nature is the right one. Nature is living; it is full of the presence of God. It is He who holds the laws of nature as the reins in His hand by which He rules the world. The forces of nature are the display of His Almighty power. Everything in nature speaks to us of God. We stand everywhere in His presence, for everything we see is but the shadow cast by His presence. People speak of the world as a mechanism like a clock wound up by a force without; others speak of it as an organism like a tree shaped and moved by its own inward life. But the true way to regard it is as a framework filled and moved by God, as the human body is filled and moved by the soul.

It is God Himself who asks Job the question, "Hath the rain a father?" And for God to ask that question is in the same breath to answer it. And the answer is put in the best possible form. It is divine language; and surely it is far better to know that God is the Father of the rain than to trace its origin no farther back than to natural

causes. You know that the rain comes from the clouds, and the clouds from the sea; that it is the sun that raises the vapours from the sea to form clouds; and that the clouds so formed are driven by the winds and attracted by the mountains, and so reach the places where they are to send down showers upon the ground. You are taught all that in your school-books; but while your mind is informed as to these natural facts, your heart asks all the time, Who superintends the wonderful process of rain-making? Who makes the sun to raise the clouds from the sea to the sky; and who makes the clouds discharge their watery burdens upon the thirsty earth? These things cannot go on of their own accord. Mere dead laws and senseless forces cannot account for them. You are persons yourselves, and you must get a personal reason; you cannot be satisfied with anything short of that. And therefore when the Bible tells you that a conscious personal Being is the Father of the rain, then you are convinced not only in your minds, but in your hearts; you find a cause adequate to the result. Oh! that we had all that true philosophic faith which enables us to trace the hand of a Divine Father in all the forms, and to hear His voice in all the sounds of nature!

If you, as little Christian philosophers, can come to this conclusion that the rain has the same

Father that made yourselves, how different it will seem to you from what it did when you looked upon it as a thing that had come by chance, or was the mere result of natural law or force. You will see in it not merely evidence of Divine power, but also of Divine love. It is not only that God makes it; that He is the creator of it; but when it is said that He is the Father of it, much more is meant than merely bringing it about. It is the very expression of a Father's love, of the very heart of God. You will feel, therefore, whenever you see the rain falling, that it is under the control of a Father who is too wise to err, and too loving to do anything that is against the real good of His creation and of His creatures. Ruskin calls it "the great angel of the sea, the messenger sent to a special place on a special errand."

And it is well for you to learn this lesson, that the rain is, in its own degree as you are in yours, the child of God, subject not only to His will, but also to His heart. For we in this dim and cloudy country have rather a prejudice against rain, imagining that we have too much of it. We think more of the discomfort than of the usefulness of it. Even our poets dwell more upon its coldness and darkness than upon its beauty. One poet compares a dreary future to a rainy sea; another listening to the falling of the rain calls it a doleful

sound; and even Tennyson, who loves every aspect of nature, has no better praise to give it than to call it "the useful trouble of the rain." I have seen a little boy or a little girl, made a prisoner by the rain on a Saturday, looking out of the window on the splashing street in a very angry spirit, fretting because the rain made it impossible to go out and play. I have even heard such a boy or girl saying, "Why does God, if He is good, send rain on the only day in which I am free to enjoy myself? Could He not make the rain to cease and the sun to shine?" And how often do grown-up people grumble at the rain because it spoils their pleasures, their plans, or their crops! All such murmurings are against the Father of the rain; against a Father's orderings, which are sure to be the wisest and best. It is not only foolish and ungrateful, but even impious. A traveller with his guide was on one occasion passing over the range of Carmel, when rain began to fall in torrents. The guide threw a large Arab cloak over the traveller, saying, "May God preserve you, while He is blessing the fields." The traveller, thus piously reminded of the blessed purpose of the rain, submitted without a murmur to the drenching. And can you not imagine yourselves even enjoying a wetting at times, when you think what good the rain does in the dry and parched

lands of the East; and how even the too great abundance of it, as we think, in winter is preparing a store of water in the ground for the needs of summer; and how at all times it is making the green things of the earth grow and flourish? How lovingly does the Bible always speak of rain; the rain which the impartial Father sends upon the just and the unjust; the "rain upon the mown grass," which the Father's tender hand sends to heal its wounds and scars, and to make it grow again. The Bible mentions it only as a theme for praise, "Sing unto the Lord, who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth." And should not the same mind be in us?

Have you ever thought how the raindrops are formed by the great Father of all? I am not speaking of the formation of the rain itself, for many causes, local and otherwise, enter into it; but of the formation of raindrops. Why do the clouds not send down their vapours in sheets or streams of water that would be very injurious, if not destructive, to the earth? That question has long puzzled many wise heads. But it is only within the last few years that the true secret of the formation of the raindrops has been found out. The atmosphere almost everywhere is filled with dust of various kinds and sizes, arising from smoke, from the germs of animal and vegetable

substances, from the waste of man's work, and from the wearing of the earth's surface. This dust floats about in the sky at great heights. You do not see it, any more than you see the dust in the air of a room; but let a beam of sunshine come into that room through a hole in the shutter, and you see myriads of motes quivering in its track. And so the very blue of the sky is caused by the reflection of the light upon the myriads of motes that fill the air. It is this dust that attracts the vapour of the clouds, and condenses the moisture that is hidden in the air. And just as a crystal is started in a solution by a nucleus of dust, so each particle of dust in the atmosphere gathers together the particles of vapour near it, and rounds them into a raindrop. Thus every raindrop requires a particle of dust to start it; and of course it takes this particle of dust down with it to the earth, and so purifies the air; and at the same time refreshes and fertilises the earth.

Now I want to draw a spiritual lesson from this remarkable fact in nature. Is this not the way in which the Father of your spirits is dealing with you? Just as in the natural world, He makes the dust in the sky into sparkling diamond raindrops, and sends them down to the earth to purify the air, to make the fruits of the earth grow, and to give His creatures water to drink; thus not

merely returning good for evil, but making the evil itself a good. So in the spiritual world your sins and iniquities, if you send them up as it were on the breath of prayer for forgiveness to heaven, will attract God's mercy to them, and they will descend in big drops of blessing upon your head, purifying your souls, and causing you to bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. You cannot have a raindrop without a speck of dust as its nucleus; and you cannot have a blessing from God without a want, or a prayer, or a wish on your part to start and form it. Is it not a wonderful thought that God can make your very sin and your very necessity bring out of His fulness what you need; that He can change the evil things that rise up from you, and darken and pollute His pure heaven, to be the means of doing you good? Are you not, therefore, convinced that it is the same God who makes the raindrops by the union of the dust of the earth and the clouds of heaven, who makes His grace to much more abound in the midst of your abounding iniquities? Hath not the rain the same Father, who is the Father of your spirits, who hath given to you not merely rains from heaven and fruitful seasons as proofs of His love, but the unspeakable gift of His own Son? It is He who makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall. It is He who has sent His own Son

to make you indeed the children of the Father, and to enable you to obey His own commandment, "Son, daughter, give me thine heart." And the more your eyes are opened to know the Father in the revelation of the gospel of His Son, and your hearts enlarged to love Him, the more you will see in all the commonest and most familiar things around you, in the weather and in the seasons, the manifestations not only of His glory but also of His grace—the signs not merely of His infinite power, but also of His infinite love.

XVIII

THE EMERALD RAINBOW

"And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."—REVELATION iv. 3.

YOU are all familiar with the sight of a rainbow. It is one of the most beautiful things in nature. It is caused by the drops of water in a cloud breaking up the rays of sunlight into their different colours, as you have seen in a prism of crystal—red, blue, yellow, and green hues. It usually appears when a storm of rain is about to cease; and it is seen in all its bright splendour against the dark bosom of the cloud that is about to melt away in the dazzling sunshine. God took this rainbow, which had hitherto been but a beautiful object shining in the heavens, and consecrated it as the image of His love and the witness of His promise. When the great flood that drowned the world had passed away, and the dry land once more appeared, the first rainbow that spanned the sky was pointed out to Noah by God as the

proof which He had chosen that the waters would no more go over the earth. And ever since, whenever this flower of light opens its seven leaves of coloured light from the dark bosom of the thunder cloud, it repeats to us continually the old assurance that seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall never cease. It is an old superstition that a treasure of gold is buried beneath the earth where the foot of the rainbow rests; but many have searched in vain for it; for when they come to the spot they find that the place on which the bright hues rested has grown dark and cold, and another spot farther on has become brightened by the magic colours. But the true interpretation of this folklore of the rainbow is that our harvest-fields ripen under its resplendent arch; and that wherever its brilliant foot rests upon the earth we find there, not a treasure of gold and jewels, but the true riches of the world, the wealth of food and clothing, without which we must perish.

But God has taken the rainbow to heaven, as He has taken all the best things of earth—the Tree of Life and the River of Life. And there in the vision which John saw through the door opened in heaven, we see the throne of God wreathed with a rainbow. And as it was on

earth the sign of the great world covenant, telling us that God is a faithful Creator; so in heaven it is the sign of the covenant of grace, telling us that God is a faithful Redeemer. The redeemed in heaven can look at the rainbow round about the throne, as they looked on earth at the natural rainbow that spanned the sky; and they feel that nothing can change or destroy their blessedness.

But you will observe that there are several differences between the rainbow of earth and the rainbow of heaven. On earth the rainbow is only half a circle. Sometimes you see it quite distinctly, a beautiful perfect arch spanning a valley; at other times you see only a bit of it faint and indistinct among the clouds. Sometimes you see the top of it without the feet; and sometimes only the feet, while the top is hidden among the dark mists. It is imperfect and incomplete; and in this respect it is the sign of a covenant which is only to last for a certain time, and which is imperfectly known and realised by human beings. Though the covenant showed that Noah's flood was no more to go over the earth, it could not hinder the final destruction of the world by fire; for we are told that in the end the world and all the works therein are to be burnt up. But in heaven the rainbow forms a complete

circle; it is round about the throne; it is seen always the same, clear, distinct, full-formed, without a cloud or shadow or mist to obscure it. And in this respect it is an emblem of an everlasting covenant; a covenant that shall endure when the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed. The redeemed shall always see its perfect circle round the throne; and they shall know that there is complete and eternal security for them, not only from the flood of judgment, but also from the fire of wrath. Their inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, unfading.

Another point of difference between the rainbow on earth and the rainbow in heaven is that the rainbow on earth is fleeting, while the rainbow in heaven is enduring. The earthly rainbow comes and goes; it appears only after a storm, and when there is a dark cloud for its background. It is formed of frail vapour and fleeting sunlight. If you could penetrate into the mystery of its origin you would see the shining particles of vapour composing it constantly changing—never for two seconds the same. The rainbow is the sign of a changing state of things; the cloud comes after the sunshine. The storm clears up, and the bright blue sky smiles serenely upon the fragrant sparkling fields rejoicing in their baptism of refreshment, and the rainbow brings its opaline

hues out of the last lingering cloud that is about to vanish in the sunshine; but by and by the storm comes again, and covers the sky and earth with its gloomy pall, and the brightness of the former scene is forgotten. Have you ever seen a rainbow at the foot of a waterfall, formed by the falling of the sun's rays on the spray that rises up from the pool at the bottom? Amid the terrible roar of the waters, and the continual motion and change, and the trembling of the leaves of the trees around, and apparently even of the solid rocks themselves, that beautiful bow maintains its form and its hues calm, clear, undisturbed. The particles of water are continually changing and passing away; but the shining colours of the lovely arch abide the same. Your life and mine is continually changing and passing away. It is never for two minutes the same, and it is spent amid things that perish in the using, amid fightings without and fears within, amid storms and strifes, and things fitted to cause fear and anxiety and care. But upon all these changes and troubles, the eye of faith sees the vision of the rainbow of God's earthly covenant shining calmly and brightly, shining most brightly when the storm is darkest, and most peacefully when the disorder is greatest, assuring us that our covenant God will keep in perfect peace the mind that is stayed

upon Him. But the rainbow in heaven shines for ever among things that are enduring. It never disappears. It is always there. The redeemed can see it continually around the throne, for there is no change in the place where it shines. All storms are over for ever and all the shadows have fled away. And those over whom the heavenly rainbow hangs its glorious arch "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

But the most striking difference of all is the colour of the heavenly rainbow as compared with that of the earthly one. The rainbow of earth is composed of seven what are called prismatic colours. And as the sign of God's covenant the seven colours are the emblems of the seven perfections of God, each in its own intensity of hue and form. Noah saw the rainbow of these seven distinct colours. Ezekiel beside the river Chebar in Babylon saw in vision a fiery red rainbow, for God was angry with His people, because they had grievously sinned against Him, and He was sitting on a throne of judgment from whence He was punishing them by national captivity. But to John the rainbow that appeared around

the throne was in sight like unto an emerald; for God was sitting on a throne of grace. All the colours seemed to be blended into one, and that the softest and most refreshing of all hues to the eye. Astronomers tell us that the stars and planets are of different colours, like jewels; some are red, others blue, others orange, and others white. If our earth were seen as a planet its colour would be green. It is the hue of the grass and the leaves, on which we love to look and can look the longest. And so in this emerald rainbow all God's perfections, His justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, and power are softened and harmonised in mercy. In the tender subdued light of His mercy we behold all His glorious attributes. And just as the Shekinah, or cloud of glory that stood over the mercy-seat in the holiest place of the tabernacle, softened the dazzling radiance of the divine light so that human eye could gaze upon it; so the emerald rainbow round about the throne toned down the fierce splendour of Him who is the Father of Lights, and the glory that would otherwise have appalled the heart and destroyed the vision was made an object of pleasing contemplation. And how blessed it is now to see all God's holy perfections in seeing His mercy; to look into the innermost core of the light which is inaccessible and full of glory, and

see there a heart beating with love and tenderness for you.

Green is peculiarly the colour of life. The creation of living matter takes place nowhere else on the face of the earth except in the green parts of plants. And such a fact as that shows to us the profound significance of the green colour which is so common and abundant in nature. Over all the fields and woodlands within the wide circle of the summer hills, every blade of grass and every leaf of herb and tree, God's great army of life, is beating back the realm of death, and adding its spoil to the grand resources of the kingdom of life. We speak of fields of living green; but the phrase is truer than we generally suppose. The green leaf which the dove brought to Noah in the ark was not merely the token that the flood had gone down, but it was actually the first power of life in a world over which the kingdom of death had for a time obtained complete sway; the means of bringing back all the animation and beauty that had perished, and changing a dead into a living world. The emerald rainbow which the apostle saw around the throne meant that the reign of death was over for ever, and that the new creation of victorious unchanging life had begun. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain:

for the former things are passed away." The decay and the passing away of this world and of human life are represented by the symbol of the fading leaf of nature; the immortal life and blessed endurance of heaven are represented by the symbol of the emerald rainbow around the throne.

The ancients spoke of the rainbow as a bridge between earth and heaven, by which the spirits of men might go up to the gods, and the gods come down to men. And has not God's own hand bent round His throne an emerald rainbow in token of love and hope, that you may go to Him and that He may come to you? His throne is now a throne of grace; it is indeed a mercy seat; and He who sits upon it is Christ Jesus, reconciling a guilty world unto Himself. His mercy thus glorified is unto all and upon all them that believe. Be not afraid; draw near to God with confidence. That emerald rainbow tells you that God for Christ's sake will give you mercy to pardon and grace to help you in every time of need. So long as you look at that rainbow that was once round about the cross at Calvary—where mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace embraced each other—but is now round about the throne of heaven, you will have freedom of access, sureness of acceptance, and

sweetness of communion. God is no more in the earthquake, nor in the whirlwind, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice of love and peace.

XIX

THE TREASURES OF DARKNESS

"I will give unto thee the treasures of darkness."—ISAIAH xlv. 3.

ALL young people instinctively dislike darkness. They have a natural feeling of dread regarding it. It is associated in their minds with evil. They are afraid to be left alone in it, lest something should harm them. This was the way too in which Cyrus the King of the Persians, to whom the words of the text were spoken by the prophet, looked at it. The religion to which he belonged believed in two gods, a good and a bad being. Light was the presence of the good principle in the universe, and darkness was the shadow cast by the evil god.

Now the God of Israel revealed Himself to the heathen monarch as the one living and true God, who Himself alone formed the light and created the darkness. There were not two gods in the universe, but only one,—a God of wisdom and love,

who did all things well. The darkness was a good, and not an evil thing. It was designed to serve a beneficent purpose in nature; and God promised to bring out of the dark things which he feared, precious things that would rejoice his heart and enrich his life. And is not God doing the same thing for us continually? The dark things which we fear are often the sources of our brightest joys. In nature it is in the darkness of the mine that we get the most radiant jewels and the most precious metals; and so in all darknesses we get the most wonderful and unexpected treasures. Look at the darkness of night, for instance; it seems to make creation so poor and empty, to rob it of all form and hue, of all heat and life, and yet it contains within itself things far more valuable than it takes away. The mysterious shadow into which the earth by its revolution on its own axis sweeps us every night, is one of the most beautiful arrangements of the natural world; one of the most striking proofs of God's wisdom and love. All nature requires it quite as much as it does the sunshine.

The first treasure which darkness gives us is rest. The daylight keeps everything in constant activity; and the frame of nature would soon be worn out were it not that the darkness of night regularly returns to put a stop to this

activity and check the excessive waste. Plants need sleep as well as animals. They fold together and droop their leaves and close their blossoms as the night approaches. And though children fight against sleep, and would like to keep awake all night, they would not live half their days without it. Sleep opens to us the beautiful world of dreams, where all sorrow and care are unknown, and the beloved dead come back and hold communion with us as in life. Sleep revives our weary minds and bodies; and we awake each morning new creatures, with new energies and new hopes. And for this refreshing rest darkness is necessary. I remember being deeply struck with this when travelling in Norway. In summer there is almost no night there; and the constant sunlight is very trying to the nervous system, and produces a feeling of excitement and restlessness which is fatal to proper repose. I longed for the relief of darkness; but the farther north I went the farther I was fleeing from it, until at last the perpetual glare of light by night and day became almost unbearable.

Another of the treasures of darkness is growth. It is in the darkness of night that the young plant grows. Through the day it is busy collecting from air and soil and sunshine the

materials of nourishment; but at night it draws upon that store, and makes use of it in building up its structure. Hence our Lord spoke in His parable about a man casting seed into the ground and sleeping, while the seed was growing at night he knew not how. And Sir Walter Scott's wise forester told his master to be aye putting a tree in the ground, "It will grow," said he, "when you're sleeping." It is in the darkness of the soil only that the roots of a plant will spread; it is in the darkness of the night only that it increases its stem and foliage. Your own bodies also grow in the darkness by the slight accumulation of material and force, which the night enables them to make over the wear and tear of the day.

Another of the treasures of darkness is the dew that cools the hot surface of the earth and refreshes the parched grass, and creates for us in the pure fresh light of morning the most radiant diamond gardens in the world. All the bright colours which adorn our world are the treasures of darkness. They are only different degrees of darkness, the different aspects which darkness assumes when struggling with light. Every colour is a compound of light and darkness. As the rainbow comes out of the dark cloud, so every hue of flower and rock and field comes out of

darkness; is just the bright selvage of the gloomy pall of darkness that shrouds everything.

But the greatest of the treasures of darkness is the universe of stars which the daylight conceals, but which comes out to view when the veil of night descends and hides the face of the earth. There is no sublimer sight to be witnessed by mortal eye than the dome of heaven at midnight sparkling with the glory of immortal worlds; and we feel when gazing up at it, as David felt, when he exclaimed: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, then say I, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

But taking darkness in its spiritual sense as the emblem of sorrow and death, of ignorance and sin, and all that makes life dark to us, we find that God is equally gracious to us in this kind of darkness too. Your life is bright just now; and sorrow and death seem like a faint far-off film of mist on your sunny horizon. But like all human beings, if spared to grow up to be men and women, that little cloud will at times spread and cover the whole heavens with gloom, and the storm will come to darken your life. It will be well then to be prepared beforehand for such

dark days, and to know what a great writer calls "the moral uses of dark things."

Look at the darkness of ignorance—has it no treasures in it? It is disgraceful to be ignorant of many things that are learned in school and from books; but there is an ignorance which every one has. For God has adapted our knowledge to our limited circumstances. It is in human life as it is in nature; a certain degree of ignorance and mystery is necessary. If you look at a landscape from the top of a hill you see it all clearly before you, but with the revelation of all its secrets all its charms have fled. How different did it appear when you could only get glimpses of it through the trees at the foot of the mountain! Romantic and grand scenery produces the most profound impression when seen from such points as do not exhaust the view; when enough, and only enough, is seen to stimulate the imagination, and solicit it onward to grander scenes beyond. So life's scenery needs to be partially veiled in the same way to preserve it from becoming tame and uninteresting to us. You do not like to see a long straight road before you; it tires your eyes and feet. You like many turnings and windings in it that may lure you on by fresh hopes and expectations. It is wonderful what the effect of a boundless horizon, without any landmarks or

limits to restrict the view, has upon the animals that dwell in it. We are told on the best authority that the curious animals called "prairie dogs," which are found on the prairies of North America, lack the sense of distance. If they are placed on a chair or a table or a window-sill they will walk off its edge without any hesitation, and of course tumble to the ground. This peculiarity is due to the nature of the place where they live, —vast level plains where there are no inequalities, nothing to break up the uniformity. And so we should have no sense of distance, of the mutual relations of things, if our vision were not limited for us by our ignorance of many things. We should have no knowledge without ignorance to mark it off and define it, just as we should have no light without darkness. Were it all light we could not see at all. It is the shadows in the light that enable us to see. And did we know all things, remaining as we are, we should have no knowledge.

Then, too, how many duties there are that if they do not entirely result from our ignorance, are enforced by it. Witness the admonition of our Saviour: "Watch, for ye *know* not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." You are to walk by faith; and faith is impossible in the full daylight of knowledge. A certain degree of darkness is necessary for faith and trust

in God. Our view must in all cases be limited if we are to see clearly. This was what God did to Israel. He made them a near-sighted people in spiritual things, in order that they might see a few most important truths with the greatest intensity, and thus be able to communicate them to others. And this in a measure is the experience of modern scientific men. They too are made near-sighted by their pursuit. Their very science is a smoked glass, which diminishes the glory of the Divine Being in order that they may distinguish better the methods of His workmanship. And then as regards religious doubt, which is the great trial of our times; if it is sincere it will lead to increased faith and spiritual discernment. Unto the upright, whose motives are sincere and who are earnestly in search of truth, light shall arise in darkness.

Looking next at the darkness of death, we find that God gives us treasures in it too. The whole eternal world is the amazing treasure that is hid in the darkness of death. Just as the daylight conceals the universe of stars, so does this life hide from our view the eternal world. Death takes us out of our narrow confined sphere here, and reveals to us a larger and grander being; teaches us that dear as our earthly home is, it is not the building, but the open porch,

where all the storms of earth assail us, and only occasional gleams of the glowing fire and the bright light of the true home within reach us in the outer darkness and coldness of the night. Were there no death, there could be no love stronger than death, swallowing up death in victory, and proving itself to be love for evermore. There would have been songs in heaven, but there would not have been "the new song of the Lamb," which is now the very sweetest of all.

But there is one form of spiritual darkness in regard to which we think God can give us no treasures; it is the darkness of sin. That is the abominable thing which God hates, and which is the only thing that is truly adverse to man. And yet, wonderful to say, God has given to us out of that terrible darkness treasures far surpassing in beauty and value all the treasures of other darknesses—viz. the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus. It was the darkness of sin,—the strange awful shadow that crept over the world when man fell,—which brought out the wonders of redeeming love. He who dwelleth in light which is inaccessible, whom no man hath seen or can see, hath become visible to us through the darkness of sin. His more abounding grace is made known to us in the midst of our abounding

iniquity. His love that passeth knowledge is revealed by the fact that He so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life. And where can we see and obtain such treasures of darkness as in the cross of Christ? When are astronomers enabled most thoroughly to study the sun? Is it not during an eclipse, when his insufferable glory is veiled? And it is in the awful eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness,—during the darkness that overspread the land for the last three hours that He hung upon the cross,—that we have a display of His love and grace such as we receive not from all His words and works besides.

Such then are the treasures of darkness which God gives to us, that we may know that He is the God of our salvation. Be not afraid then of the dark things of life. Even when most alone in the night, you are least alone, for the very darkness is the shadow of God's wing; and that proves that He is near you, watching over you and keeping you safely. Jesus has gone to the lowest depth of darkness,—has sounded it all by His own experience, for He was forsaken of God. And He was forsaken that no child of man who trusts in Him might ever more feel forsaken. May you cling to Him both when the light shines

upon your path, and when your life is overshadowed by the gloom of some trouble! May no darkness of sin or sorrow or unbelief separate you from Him to whom the darkness and the light are both alike!

XX

THE SNOWDROP

"If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"—MATTHEW vi. 30.

MANY beautiful and instructive things have been said about this text; and many more beautiful and instructive things remain to be said, for the theme is inexhaustible. But instead of speaking at large upon the general subject, I wish to confine your attention to one very familiar example of the charm and the interest that there is about flowers. This example belongs to the present season; and it is so common and abundant that every child knows it. I do not therefore feel the want of illustrations in speaking of the snowdrop as I should otherwise do; for you can picture in your own minds from your knowledge of the flower the things that I wish to point out to you. The snowdrop is the first flower of the year, and on that account is peculiarly loved by every one.

It ventures forth alone when the snow is thawing, and the trees are naked and dripping, and the skies are overcast, calm and serene in its drooping patience and modesty, as if assured of victory over all its dangers. We hail it as a very star of hope amid all the wreck and decay of nature,—as the one bright link between the perishing good of the past and the brighter living good that is to come. God sends forth from the great earth-ark, riding securely over the winter desolation that has destroyed all life and beauty, this pure white dove, to bring the green leaf of the renewed earth home to us, and to tell us that the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

Consider then how this foremost herald of our long-lost friends grows! You have often watched, I am sure, the first green points of the snowdrop as they appeared above the brown earth from which the snow has just melted away. Each root sends up two leaves that unite so closely that they form a thin hard wedge, well fitted to pierce through the soil into the air. By and by, as they push up they separate, and show, cradled between them, a little speck of white, which is the infant flower, with a green hood over it. This flower expands from its sheath, and rapidly outgrows the leaves which lag behind, and do not attain

their full size till the flower is withered. There is a wise reason for this. The flower is more important than the leaves, for it is by the flower that the plant is perpetuated year after year. The leaves are for the nourishing of the single plant; the flowers are for the forming of the seeds by which the race is kept up, and new plants grow when the old ones have died. Seeing then that the safety of the whole race depends upon the flowers, Nature hastens, when there is any danger to the life of the species, in the season that is full of storm and frost, to do the most important thing first—to produce the flowers before the leaves. That is the wise reason why the flower of the snowdrop outruns and overtops in the race of life its leaves, and why all spring flowers send their blossoms straight up from the root before the leaves.

The flower of the snowdrop, as you all know, droops, forming a little snowy tassel at the top of the stalk. But this stalk is very nearly straight, and bends but very slightly to the weight of the flower. Now I want you to examine the first snowdrop you see, and to notice the remarkable way in which the flower is attached to the stalk. It is by a neck so slender that you wonder how it can support the flower. Well, the wise Hand that cannot err gives the flower this extremely

slight stalk in order that it may move freely with every change of wind. From whatever point the storm blows, the flower hanging so lightly on its stem is able to turn its back to the blast, and thus protect its vital parts, as you yourselves turn round when the rain and the wind strike too violently in your face. Looking at the snowdrop with its drooping head and slender stem, so delicate and fragile altogether, you would say that such a flower was utterly unfit to come forth and brave the storms of early spring. It seems like cruelty to expose it to the fierce blasts, which, with their first wild rush, would tear it from its stem and destroy it utterly. And yet its apparent weakness is in reality its strength; from its seeming fragility arises its power of endurance. Were its stem firmer and stronger, it would be at once broken. But with its slender attachment it yields to every wind, which thus passes over it safely. Thus you see there is a wonderful fitness between the snowdrop and the stormy season in which it grows. God's strength is made perfect in its weakness; and it is by the weak things that God conquers the mighty. You often notice that young growing things are made tender in order that the wild forces of nature may not destroy them. It is because the growing ends of the branches of trees are so pliant and yielding that

the winds do not tear them off. And so it is good in the human world as well as in the natural, to bear the yoke in youth, for then the nature is more elastic to struggle with the evils of the world. And the lesson is taught you by the humble snowdrop that stoops to conquer, that yields to the storm in order to overcome it, that you must cherish a graceful, yielding spirit if you would overcome the world ; giving way in all circumstances in which it is best that you should give way, while rooted firmly at the same time in the strength of right principles.

But not only is the flower of the snowdrop provided with a stalk so slender that it accommodates itself to every wind that blows, but the drooping head, as you know, has three large outer leaves which overhang the inner portion, and act like a penthouse or the projecting eaves of a roof, in flinging off every drop of rain. The storm cannot therefore touch the inside of the flower, which is the most precious part. And thus protected by its slender neck and by its projecting outer leaves alike from the wind and the rain, the snowdrop lives unhurt, and carries on all its vital purposes amid the wildest weather. It is regarding these three outer leaves of the flower, which are pure white, that we can use the words of the text about God clothing the grass

of the field. The snowdrop has not the ruff of green leaves at the back of the flower which you notice in other plants. This is the peculiarity of the lily tribe to which the snowdrop belongs. Its flower seems as if it proceeded directly from the stem without any covering of green leaves around it. Such flowers used to be called naked flowers. It is now, however, proved that the flowers of the lily tribe, so far from being left unclothed, not only possess the usual ruff or outer portion, but that in hue and texture and shape it matches the inner one; and the combination produces the loveliest coloured flowers in the world. The outer leaves of the snowdrop flower serve the purpose of the green ruff in other plants, and they are larger, more brilliantly white, and more beautifully shaped than even the blossom itself. God has thus clothed with a wonderful beauty, by way of reward and compensation, that part of the plant which fulfils the gracious purpose of protecting the flower.

I have said that the reason why the flower of the snowdrop droops upon its stem is that in this way it may be more effectually protected from the storm. But a more particular reason is that the honey which it contains may be guarded from being melted away by the rains of January and February, which would soon fill the cup of the

flower if it were always erect like a goblet. The insects that fertilise it have therefore to creep into the flower from below, as it hangs on its stem, in search of honey. It is in order to attract these insects that the snowdrop is made so conspicuous by its whiteness, coming up as it does in a dark cloudy season. Few insects indeed are abroad so early in the year; but winter and early spring have their regular brood of moths, and the moths appear and feed during the afternoon and evening when there is little light in the sky. The flowers of the snowdrop are therefore made pure white in order that the moths may visit them; for it is a curious thing that white flowers are principally fertilised by night insects. And it is for the same reason that the outer leaves of the flower in the snowdrop are pure white. When a flower assumes a drooping position the outer leaves are usually coloured. If they were green like the ruff of other plants, this greenness hanging over more than half of the drooping flower would dim and conceal it from the eye of the insects, and the flower would therefore not be fertilised nor produce seed.

If you turn up the flower of a snowdrop and look attentively at its inner parts, you will see that the tips of each of its white petals are touched with little spots of green, and

that the insides of them are streaked with bright green lines or veins. These are not merely for ornament, for human eyes cannot usually see them in their natural position, and they were never intended to be looked at downside upwards. They serve as honey-guides to insects. For these green lines meet at the point in the cup of the flower where the honey is hidden, and an insect following them would be sure to find it. But it does not get the honey for nothing; it has to do a service for it. In following the green streaks to the honey-store it is sure to take away with it some of the dust or pollen on its body; and when it visits another snowdrop it fertilises it with this dust, and thus enables it to produce seed. You thus see that there is not a speck of colour in a flower but has a wise meaning, and serves a useful purpose besides adorning the flower. I have said that owing to the drooping habit of the flower the beauty of its interior is not usually visible; but when it is closely examined, its green veins and its orange centre are found to make with its pure white leaves a most beautiful and harmonious picture. It might seem of no consequence what was in the inside of a flower if the outside were beautiful. But God does not, like man, make a beautiful front of marble to the street and an ugly building of brick to the back. He

finishes everything perfectly behind and before. We find in every flower, however humble, the same principle at work, the force of which the old sculptors felt when they finished the hidden side of their statues; for they said, "The gods are everywhere."

But not only have the green marks and lines in the inside of the flower of the snowdrop a meaning to insects, guiding them to the honey; they have also a meaning in reference to the origin of the flower. Green is the common colour of leaves; it is very rare in flowers. And yet all flowers were originally green. "Nothing but leaves" is literally true of all the parts of a plant. The seed is just one leaf or two leaves packed up into the smallest compass; and all the growth of the plant is simply the unfolding of that one leaf or these two leaves. All the parts of the plant are simply ordinary green leaves modified. The flower is composed of green leaves, changed into different shapes and colours to suit the new purpose for which they are required, viz. to prepare the seed. The parts of the flower are simpler in structure than green leaves; and for this reason they are more easily worked into such a marvellous variety of shapes and colours. It is because they are so simple in structure that they are usually produced at the top of the plant when

there is not material and vital force enough to produce ordinary green leaves. It is for the same reason that the plant, when its safety is endangered by poor soil, an inclement season, or unfavourable conditions, hastens to produce flowers, which are easier, so to speak, to make than green leaves ; so that, whatever happens to the individual, there will be provision made for the perpetuation of the race.

Look then at the way in which God clothes the grass. He makes the bright flower out of the green leaf. It is not merely that the green leaf helps to grow the flower ; that the flower comes out of the foliage in the order of succession and growth, but the flowers are made out of the very substance and after the very pattern of the leaves, They are made, so to speak, out of the same creative loom, with the same threads. They are, so to speak, the selvage or border of the web. And you know how the weaver makes his selvage of coloured threads, of a more ornamental pattern than the rest of the cloth. So God acts in the same way, and when His material is exhausted, and the end of His web is reached, He winds up with flowers instead of leaves. The meaning, therefore, of the green colour on the white flower of the snowdrop is that it is a birth-mark—a memory of its origin. It tells us the strange

secret how the pure white petals were formed out of green leaves. It is a going back to the original condition of green leaves on the part of the grass which God has so sumptuously clothed with white robes. Is it not wonderful that it is when the plant is poorest in material and vital force that God causes it to flower and display its greatest loveliness? Who could dream that out of such weakness and poverty the most splendid blossoms could be produced; that the very imperfection of the plant is the cause of all the wonderful beauty of the garden and the field! And is it not amazing to think that a simple green leaf could be changed into so many exquisite forms; that nature can play such endless harmonies on one string?

There is a charming legend which tells us how an angel was sent to comfort Eve when she was banished from the Garden of Eden, and was mourning over the barren wilderness outside. No flower grew upon the soil cursed for man's sin, and the snow fell and covered the earth with a dreary shroud. It seemed as if it were the funeral of the world. But while the angel was speaking to Eve he caught a flake of falling snow, breathed upon it, and bade it take form and live. Ere it had reached the ground it had turned into a beautiful flower, which Eve prized more than all the fair blossoms she had left behind in Paradise;

for the angel told her that it was the earnest of a happier time, when the lost joys should be restored and the summer that had vanished should come again. The angel disappeared, and where he had stood a ring of snowdrops sprang up and kept alive the memory of his cheering words. And does not God every year in spring seem to make out of the snow of winter a living flower; show us how the beauty of the snow can be preserved, and yet have nothing of its cold cheerless deathliness; how the lower form of purity in inanimate nature—the purity of the snowflake—can be replaced by the higher and more perfect purity of life—the purity of the snowdrop? This is but one of the lower steps of a ladder which must end in heaven, pointing us to a world where nothing that defileth can enter, and he that overcometh shall be clothed with white raiment, and shall manifest the highest form of purity.

The white lily or the white snowdrop is the priestess of the flowers, for the robe of those who are consecrated to the service of God is white. God clothes the grass of the field with more than the glory of Solomon, for it has more than the wisdom of Solomon to teach us. So clothed in white it speaks to us of Him who so arrayed it, and who sits on the great white throne. It brings up solemn thoughts of the Hand that made it, and of

the purpose for which He made it. You cannot study the structure of the snowdrop without being deeply struck with the thought of a Designer. You cannot consider its wonderful adaptation to the circumstances in which it is placed, its perfect and constant adjustment to its season and mode of growth, without feeling that there must be a superintending Providence. But the lesson which Jesus meant above all to teach you by it is that, while God cares for the lilies of the field in this wonderful way, He cares far more for human beings, and especially for His own disciples. The human soul alone bears the image of God; it alone is immortal; and while the grass withereth and the flower fadeth, while the snowdrop perishes in a few weeks and vanishes every season, and all the goodliness of this visible creation will one day come to an end, the soul which perceives and admires and enjoys it all will live for ever. Never forget then to value your immortal souls above everything else; and seek by God's grace to make yourselves in harmony with God's creation, and to be wiser and more fitted for the glory that shall be revealed one day in you, by a profitable use of the lessons which the grass of the field is teaching you. The grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, is clothed with such wonderful beauty, in order that by its teach-

ing you may learn to trust and love and serve Him who can not only clothe your perishing bodies with perishing raiment, but also clothe your never-dying souls with the garments of salvation,—the pure linen, white and clean, which is the righteousness of saints. It is for the sake of educating and preparing that higher and more enduring beauty—the beauty of holiness—that all beauty in God's works exists!

XXI

THE SPARROW

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?"—LUKE xii. 6.

JESUS had a very keen eye for noticing things. Nothing escaped His attention. We have a striking instance of the fineness of His observation in the way in which He tells us sparrows were sold in the market-place. He says in one place, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" and then in the text he says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?" He noticed that a person got two sparrows for one farthing, but if he bought two farthings' worth he got not four but five; that is, one was counted for nothing—given, as we call it, "to the bargain." Now, which of these five sparrows was the one thrown in to the bargain, as if it were nothing? It might be any of them. But Christ said that not one of them is forgotten before God. Whichever of these sparrows was so lightly esteemed by man as to be thrown away—given

to the bargain,—not worth even the widow's mite, which is the smallest of all coins,—God thought of it, and valued it, and cared for it.

The sparrow of the Holy Land is not the same as our common house-sparrow, but it has the same bold familiar habits. It loves to nestle about the habitations of men. In Jerusalem it is very numerous about the crevices of the city walls, and in the more lonely streets it is so noisy as almost to overpower every other sound. It gets the name of *tsippor*, from the chirping, twittering sound which it makes, like our own sparrow. The custom of selling sparrows is a very ancient one. In the days of our Lord they were sold in the market as food for the poorest classes, for, being so small and so abundant, their value singly was very trifling. If you visited one of the Jewish markets you would see the fowlers offering for sale long strings of these little creatures, which they had caught with a snare, ready plucked and trussed on slender wooden skewers; for in Italy and the East they eat the smallest birds, which we should not think it worth while to kill for the sake of food; and this is a custom which shocks every one from this country who sees it as a useless waste. In these markets the Jew could also buy living sparrows for the purpose of offering them in sacrifice in the temple, because they were seed-

eating, and therefore accounted clean. When a leper was cleansed, two sparrows were to be taken by the priest, and one was to be killed, and the other was to be dipped alive in the blood of its fellow, and then let loose in the open field. This was a simple and beautiful type of a sinful soul set free from guilt by the Saviour's death.

Now you are apt to fancy that the value which you put upon a creature so small and so abundant as a sparrow, is the value which God puts upon it. You do not think much of it because it is so common, and therefore you suppose that God does not think much of it. But there cannot be a greater mistake. The very commonness of a thing is just the best proof of its high value in God's sight. Do you not know that the most precious things in the world,—the things that God thinks most of, and that are most necessary for the life and wellbeing of man,—are the most common and abundant; the common air that is all about you, the common water everywhere, the common light that fills the whole world, the common love that keeps up life and that is in every human heart and home. The picture which the artist paints most frequently is the one that he likes best; the ideas which the writer repeats continually are his favourite ideas; the music that you love most, you like to hear over and over

again. And so if God makes a great deal of a thing, and multiplies it, and never wearies of repeating it, is not that in itself a proof that He values it highly, and has an important use for it? Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United States, had a dream one night in which he fancied himself passing through a great crowd along a lane which they made for him. "He is a common-looking fellow," some one said. Lincoln in his dream turned to his critic and replied, "Friend, the Lord prefers common-looking people; that is why He made so many of them." The sparrow must therefore, on this principle, be specially owned by God, since it is the commonest of all birds, both in our own and in other lands.

In order to enable it to become so common and abundant God has endowed it with special qualities which other birds do not possess. He has made it hardier in constitution; He has given it a quick eye, sharp, cunning ways, and quick movements, by which it can escape danger; He has made it to frequent the haunts of men, so that it can get its food more easily and certainly than other birds; and He has made its plumage so dull and quiet that it is not easily seen among the dark shady streets and houses, and thus eludes the notice of its many enemies. It is wonderful how God adapts creatures to the places where

they live, so that they may be concealed from their foes. The birds of the moorland are brown like the heather, so that when lying down among it you cannot notice them ; and the birds of the woods are green and gray, like the foliage of the trees and the lichen-covered trunks. In the Kensington Natural History Museum may be seen in a case stuffed specimens of the Kentish plover, whose eggs and young are so exactly like the gray mottled round stones of the beach where the bird builds its nest, and which are also in the case, that you cannot for a long time find them out. If the eggs and the young had not this protective resemblance to the stones around them, they would soon be snapped up by hawks and other enemies. Now God has made the sparrow in the same way to resemble the places where it is found ; and surely God must care much for such little birds when He gives them such wonderful means of concealment and protection.

And did not God set a high value upon the sparrow when He appointed it to be the means of cleansing the leper? Two sparrows might, indeed, be sold for one farthing, but if the one by its blood atoned for the leper's sin, and the other by its flight carried that sin away, were these little lives not unspeakably precious to the man or woman who was delivered from such an awful

disease? That farthing which they cost did more good than a fortune of silver and gold could do; and reminds you how very simple and small and easy,—within reach of every one,—the poorest of the poor,—are the means of our great salvation. And thinking of these things, is not the lesson clear to you that if God cares so much even for the odd sparrow given to the bargain when two farthings' worth of sparrows are bought, how much more must He care for you, whom He made in His own image? "Ye are of more value," He says, "than many sparrows!" The sparrow can be sold for a mite, which is half a farthing; but your value is not in an earthly currency, but in a heavenly. You are redeemed not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. And Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Cornelia, the daughter of the great Scipio, and the mother of the Gracchi, among the most illustrious names of ancient Rome, when asked on one occasion to show to some friends her treasures, presented her two sons, and said with a fond pride, "These are my jewels." You are the Lord's jewels, which He is making up for the great day of the manifestation of the sons of God. And therefore you may be sure that He will watch over you and provide for you, with tender and con-

siderate care, every moment of your life. He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up unto death for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give all things that are needed for your good?

And if God cares in this way for yourselves, should you not prove your gratitude and love by caring for what He cares for? There is a popular proverb that says, "Love me, love my dog." And if you love God, you must love the dumb creatures He has made and watches over. An old lady in her ninety-second year said a very short time before her death, "I hope that the time will come when children shall be taught that mercy to birds and beasts is part of religion." Common sparrows seem to be the lawful prey of boys. There is nothing to prevent them from throwing stones at them, and ill-using them if they can catch them. There are some birds that are protected by a feeling of sacredness about them. Nobody would hurt a robin red-breast, because of the touching story told of its scattering leaves over the babes in the wood; and because, according to one beautiful legend, it got its crimson breast from its being wounded by one of the thorns which it wished to take out of Christ's crown of thorns on the cross; and, according to another, from its being scorched by the flame of the place of torment, which it tried to put out with a drop of water from its bill.

But there is no such innocent superstition to guard the poor sparrow in this country. Nobody cares what happens to it! But it was different in olden times and in eastern lands. Cruel as we think the Asiatic people to have been in many other things, they were at least kind to little birds. The Hebrew Psalmist sings of how the sparrow had found her a nest beside the altars of the Lord of Hosts; and at the present day crowds of sparrows may be seen hovering about the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem, which occupies the ground where the temple of Solomon stood, and are treated with great reverence as being under the divine protection, and nobody dare harm them.

We are told that the Athenians of old actually condemned a man to death for molesting a sparrow which had taken refuge in the temple of Æsculapius, the god of medicine. There is a beautiful story told of Aristodicus of Cyme, who protected a man who fled to his city from Cyrus, the Persian king, even though the oracle of the temple commanded him to be given up. He went and took down the sparrows' nests from the old temple walls; and, while he was doing this a voice came from the sanctuary and said, "Oh! most impious of men, how darest thou do this? Dost thou tear my suppliants from my temple?" Aristodicus answered, "Art thou then so careful to succour thy

suppliants, but commandest my people to deliver up theirs?" By this beautiful parable he showed how deep was the reverence that guarded the sparrows which lived in the temple. It would be a good thing if the same sacred protection extended to birds in our own country. The great St. Francis of Assisi had a heart overflowing with love for all God's creatures, not only for man, but even for the birds in the branches. He was their friend, and called them his sisters. And he had in consequence the most wonderful power of attracting them to him,—even the most shy and timid of them,—like a second Adam in a new Eden. And this power he had because he had a noble conception of a redeemed world,—a world full of the sense of the Creator's presence and the Saviour's love. All things that had life were, therefore, brought for him within the limit of a Catholic blessing; and over the birds and the flowers was cast the beautiful shadow of Christianity.

Have you ever asked yourselves, my dear young friends, the question, What were the haunts of the sparrow when men lived in tents, and there were neither houses nor villages nor towns? If the sparrows were originally wild, living far away from human dwellings, it is long since they have come to dwell with man, and to put themselves under

his protection, and to eat his food. Why has God given them this strange habit? Why has He made them seek refuge with you? Is it not that you may treat them as the Arab treats the guest who comes to his tent and eats of his salt—kindly and gently? As domestic animals, as members of the household, they are given to your hands by God to care for, to cherish with something like sympathetic regard; for this reason above all others, that they teach you wise thoughts of the God who watches over them with gentle care, who marks with pity the fall of the young helpless sparrow out of its nest to the ground. Your treatment of them has an important part to play in the forming of your own character and the discipline of your own life. Your kind treatment of them will make your own heart tender, and keep the wellspring of affection flowing when it might otherwise be frozen or dried up by the unkindness of the world. A great naturalist said, "I feel dependent for a vigorous and hopeful spirit upon now and then the laugh of a child, the twitter of a bird, or the silent greeting of a flower." And of all the natural things that cheer and charm us most, that give us the purest and most unalloyed pleasure, there is nothing like the companionship and song of birds, and the study of their little ways. And there is nothing better for a boy or a

girl than to have some bird or animal to tend. It is an education in itself. It is awfully bad for a child to grow up callous towards the cruelties that birds and beasts suffer in this sinful world, and see it all and never feel a mite of pity or desire to prevent it. Why should the beautiful feeling of sacredness which we have about a few favourite birds, such as the robin, giving them an interest in our blessed religion, not be extended to all birds, to guard and hallow everything that God has made? Why should not every Christian boy and girl in this nineteenth century of the Christ-lore resolve never to rob a bird's nest, never to make sport out of ill-treating any of God's birds, never to wear an ornament in bonnet or dress that has needlessly cost a little bird's life? A band of hope of that kind, bringing the law of God down into the little things of everyday life, about which young people are usually so careless and callous, would do a world of good; and would show that Christ's loving words about the sparrows were not lost upon you!

XXII

GIFTS FROM ABOVE

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."—
JAMES i. 17.

IT is not from the lowest but from the highest points that the best things in the world always come. We get from the sky and not from the earth all those gracious influences without which our world would be only a gigantic lifeless cinder rolling through space. Light and heat come down to us from above; and so do the sunshine that warms and quickens and beautifies everything, and the rain and the dew that refresh the face of nature. You suppose that a tree gets the materials of its growth from the earth; that the good things which it requires for its wellbeing come from below. But in reality a tree gets what it needs for its life and growth not so much from the soil as from the sky. It transforms the rain and the sunshine into branches and leaves. It takes all that vast mass of solid wood which you see and touch out of

the viewless air. The ground is to the plant mainly the soil in which its roots are fixed, that gives it stability; while it obtains its food chiefly from above, from the air and the sunshine and the showers of heaven.

Then too it is from the highest parts of the earth's surface, and not from the lowest parts, that all the good things come which make the earth such a beautiful and comfortable home for man. The mountains and not the plains are the sources of our greatest and most precious gifts. Were it not for the mountains there would be no streams to quench our thirst and water our fields, —no winds to purify the air,—no clouds to overshadow the earth in the heat of the day, and to keep in its warmth from being diffused in space at night. It is from the mountains that the soil in which we grow our daily bread has come. They are continually yielding their own substance, which is being ground down by the streams that channel their sides, and carried away to nourish the plains, and to recover from the waters larger spaces of dry land which we can cultivate.

And is it not a very beautiful as well as a very striking thought that all our flowers came to us originally from the mountains,—from the highest and not from the lowest parts of the earth? Geologists tell us that at one time the earth was

covered with an atmosphere of carbonic acid gas so dense that only huge ferns and mosses and plants that had nothing but green leaves could grow on it. At that time the mountains rose above this foul atmosphere; and on them began to appear for the first time in the purer air a new race of plants that put forth bright-coloured blossoms in the clear sunshine. All flowers were thus originally alpine flowers. They bloomed on the heights; and when the foul atmosphere of the plains and valleys vanished gradually, and the air and sunshine became so clear and bright that flowers could breathe in them, they descended as God's good and perfect gifts from above, to beautify the lowlands with their lovely presence. In many parts of the earth the light does not appear all at once over the whole region. It comes from the highest points. The rising sun first illumines the loftiest mountain top, and then the light creeps down from the higher to the lower levels, and at last fills all the valleys with its radiance. In some remote primitive parts of Switzerland a man stands at early dawn on a rising ground near his village, and when he sees the highest snowy peak flushing red with the first rays of the sun, he sounds his alpine horn, and all in the neighbourhood who hear it know that a new day has begun, and they prepare to go forth to their labours.

Thus you see that even in the natural world every good and perfect gift literally is from above. The things that make this world most beautiful and best fitted to be our abode come from the heights. And is there not a wise lesson for your souls in this common but very striking fact? If your ordinary natural life is supported and enriched by the good things that come to you from the sky and from the highest parts of our own earth, how much more should your true life,—the immortal life of your souls,—be nourished and enriched by the good things that come to you from the highest of all sources, from the Author of every good and perfect gift—the Father of Lights? Think of a world without a sky! Think of a human life without a heaven over it, with no good or perfect gift coming down to it from above! And yet many people are trying to satisfy their immortal longings by things that come to them from below, from the earth and not from heaven. The gifts that most people call good and perfect —substantial things that can make them, as they think, truly rich and happy—are things that they get from below and not from above; gold from the mine, pearls from the depths of the ocean, the materials of grand houses from the quarry, and the products of merchandise from the soil. These are the *goods* that most people value.

And yet what would these things that come to them from below avail to sustain even their natural life, if they had not with them the things that come to them from above,—the things of the sky, the rain and the sunshine, and the vital air, of which they are unconscious? They would perish amid the very abundance of their good things. You know the old story of Midas, king of Phrygia, who the richer he grew, the greater was his thirst for gold. Having on one occasion entertained a god very hospitably during his visit to earth, the grateful divinity promised that he would give him whatever he wanted. Midas wished that everything he touched might turn to gold. He got what he wanted, his good and perfect gift from below, and the gratification of his wish nearly proved his ruin; for the food he touched and the friends he came into contact with all became converted into hard gold; and he could get nothing to eat or drink, and no one to love him or associate with him. He became a terror to everybody and a curse to himself. And he was about to die of starvation when he implored the god to take back his fatal gift. He could only escape from his misery by purifying himself at the command of the god in the river Pactolus, which has ever since washed down gold in its sands. And so many people seem only made of money—hard and narrow and selfish;

they are converted into gold themselves, and everything that they touch is changed into gold. Their good and perfect gifts come to them from the mine and the quarry and the soil,—from below and not from above ; and the consequence is that their higher nature starves, and is in danger of perishing amid all these fatal gifts of earth. From this pain and misery they can only escape by washing themselves in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, which will purify them from this base desire and evil habit, and make them new creatures capable of setting their affections on things above.

Do you know what the real meaning of idolatry is ? It is the love and the worship of that which is beneath ourselves,—of that which is below, and not of that which is above. Persons with immortal souls sell themselves for mortal perishing things. Persons with high-born natures place their chief good in mere dead material things. But God has given you a nature so great that no created thing can satisfy it. Made in the image of God, only God Himself can supply your need. It is not the things that come to you from the earth that will fill the void of your nature, but the things that come to you from heaven. You cannot call any gift that comes to you from below a good gift, for it is mixed with the evil of the earth, like the pure snow when it is soiled by the mud of the

ground ; or a perfect gift, because it is passing and perishing, and even when at its best it cannot satisfy your nature. There is ever some drawback to the goodness of the gift that you get from below ; some imperfection that, like the worm in the apple, spoils the beauty and the sweetness of it. It is about the things that come from below that people always quarrel ; about their lands and wealth and houses and properties — all of the earth earthy. These are the causes of the frequent strifes and jealousies and greeds that make life often so unhappy. People do not quarrel about the things that come from above — about the sunshine and the rain and the sweet influences of the starry Pleiades ; and the things of divine grace from a higher source still—the love and the beauty of heaven. The things that come from above sweeten and ennoble life, reconcile and unite men to one another and make one family, one loving brotherhood of the human race.

It is of the utmost importance then that you should covet earnestly the best gifts ; that you should set your affections on the things that are above. Just as the best things of the world come from the highest parts of the world,—from the mountains and not from the plains,—so in the sphere of natural things there are higher and lower things, and the highest things are always the best.

Mental pleasures are far better than bodily pleasures, and moral goodness than intellectual cleverness. Seek then the things that are above in the common affairs of your daily life. In your conversation choose high subjects, not low gossip. In your companionship choose friends who will raise the tone of your life, and do you good like a fresh breeze from a mountain top. In your reading select that which instructs rather than that which stimulates and excites you; and above all, make the Bible your study, for its distinguishing characteristic is that it forces you to look upwards. Let your thoughts gravitate not earthward like a stone, but heavenward, like a ray of light that goes back to its source in the sun. Let them aspire towards the face of Jesus, of your future home, of the loved ones who have gone before you, and who beckon you towards them. Your true treasure is in heaven; let your heart follow after it.

The best and most perfect of all gifts has come from above, the unspeakable gift of God's dear Son; and with the gift of His own Son He gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit, that you may know and appreciate fully all the goodness and perfection of Jesus Christ, and make Him your own; that He may work in you the faith which is the gift of God, by which you may believe in

Christ to the saving of your soul, and enjoy all the blessings of salvation. "If ye being evil," God says to earthly parents, "know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Christ teaches you that it is the good pleasure of the Father to give to His children. He does not bargain with them—so much blessing for so much service. He gives, and gives freely and liberally, all that you need. He is the all-wise and the all-loving God, and therefore He can only give the perfect things—that which is best fitted to make you truly blessed. He does not give capriciously or by partiality, bestowing upon one and withholding from another; but He gives according to immutable law, without variableness or shadow of turning. He knows the things that you need, and He will give them to you; not a stone but bread for your hunger, not a serpent but an egg for your feast. If you accept God's unspeakable gift, then all other gifts will be yours to the bargain as it were, for they are included in it; they are enriched by the blessing and sweetened by the love of Christ.

In Christ the blessings of this life itself come to you from above, strained and filtered of all their evil, and made truly satisfying without any sorrow being added. And you will get every good and perfect gift from above—from the Father of Lights,

by that wonderful ladder set up between earth and heaven along which the angels are ascending and descending—the new and living way of Christ's finished work—in answer to that real earnest prayer of yours which brings your heart and mind into closest contact with the mind and heart of God. Cry to Him for that for which your soul truly longs, for you can do without the things that come to you from below, but you cannot do without the things that come to you from above; cry to Him earnestly, perseveringly, and the good and perfect gift which will truly enrich and bless you will be yours. Scientific men tell us that the nearer you get to the sun the more not only does the sun attract you, but also the more do you attract the sun. On the top of a mountain a child in proportion to his size and weight makes the sun to bend towards him. And so God's own Word tells you that the influence of love is mutual, that if you draw nigh to God He will draw nigh to you by virtue of the attraction which you have for Him and He has for you. He will bring you into fellowship with Him not as a mere favour, but as the necessary result of your own approach to Him.

Let the attraction of God lift up your whole nature, your whole life nearer to Him. Let not your religion be the mere sending up of a solitary pillar of a prayer, or a pious wish or feeling from

one part of your being, but the looking and stretching upwards of your whole being. You know in nature that the solitary column that rises above the plain attracts the lightning to blast and destroy. But the multitudinous spear-points of the wide grassy field draw down the lightnings and the dews and rains of heaven gently and with refreshing and fertilising power. And so a religion of mere occasional formal acts of devotion will do you more harm than good; but if you live near to your Father habitually, on a uniformly high level, then you will be able to feel more and more of the love in Christ Jesus, which He so freely and ungrudgingly gives you, and which above all other things is *the* good and perfect gift that is from above.

XXIII

THE GOLD OF SHEBA

"To him shall be given of the gold of Sheba."—PSALMS lxxii. 15.

ONE of the oldest and most interesting stories in the world is that which describes the adventures of Jason and his companions in the ship *Argo* in search of the golden fleece at Colchis. This story, when stripped of its beautiful poetry, is just an account of the ancient method of finding and separating gold from the sand in which it occurred, by causing the golden sand to pass in flowing water over sheep-skins which retained the heavier particles. These sheep-skins, when loaded with the precious metal, were stored for future use, and thereby tempted the trader and the robber. Gold was the first metal that was used by men, because it was often found in nature in a state capable of being beaten out into shape without requiring to be first smelted and purified; and therefore among the lowest savages ornaments of

gold made by their own hands were common, in the absence of all other metals.

Gold is the most perfect of all metals. It withstands for ever the action of wind and wave, and only passes through the furnace to be purified and exalted from its fires. Undimmed by the breath of time, untarnished by the air of the world, the gold of Ophir is still fresh and glittering in the coinage of to-day; and being thus always the same, there has always been a sense of sacredness connected with it. The articles of the Jewish tabernacle were either made entirely of gold or overlaid with it. The first coinage of the world had a purely religious aspect. When the happy idea first dawned upon men of stamping gold, instead of weighing it, as they used to do, a guarantee of just weight and purity of metal would be required for this new form of money. In an age of universal belief—when the gods lived, as it were, among men, and when every transaction was confirmed by a solemn oath—this guarantee was given by putting upon the gold coin the image and the name of the god that was most honoured or dreaded in the place where it was meant to circulate. No mere king, however great or powerful, ever dared at first to put his own image and superscription on the current coin, for such a proceeding would be regarded as

sacrilege. Accordingly, on all the oldest gold coins you never find the head of a king but the head of a god, by which all might know that it was genuine, and was sacred to Apollo or Jupiter as the case might be. More than mortal as Alexander the Great was supposed to be, yet he never once during his lifetime allowed his own portrait to be put upon his coins. It was only after his death that the custom came in of placing the head of the sovereign on the coin of the realm; but it was so contrary to the religious ideas of the people that it was only by slow degrees that it came to be universally adopted. It is a relic of this old idea of the sacredness of gold that the pyx or box, containing the standard trial pieces of gold used for testing the gold coin of our country issued from the royal mint, should be kept in a chamber in Westminster Abbey, called the Treasury of England.

No more acceptable gift could be presented to a king than a quantity of gold; and accordingly we read that the wise men of the East gave to the infant Jesus gold as well as frankincense and myrrh. And in my text we are told that to the king that was to reign in righteousness over the Jews the gold of Sheba was to be given; this king being the type of the Messiah, to whose coming the Jews looked forward so eagerly.

Sheba was one of the places where the ancient Jews got their gold. It is supposed to have been in the south of Arabia. No gold is found in that region now, but in the days of the Psalmist it appears to have been abundant. The Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon brought large quantities of it with her as a present to the king. And what seems to have distinguished this gold above all others was its very fine quality. The Hebrews had no less than six different names to mark out the different varieties of this metal. And the term employed in the original in the text points out that the gold of Sheba was exceptionally pure. Purity was an essential quality in gold that was to be given to the king or to be employed for a sacred purpose. There must be no alloy or mixture of inferior metal in it. And the principle upon which this custom was based is that to both God and the king nothing but the very best must be given.

When the Psalmist therefore says that to the Messiah shall be given of the gold of Sheba, he means in figurative language that all the best that man possesses shall be bestowed upon Him. And is this not a sign to you that you are to give your very best to Christ? He is the King who has proved His right to reign over you by having subdued all your enemies and laid down His life

to save you; and therefore you are to give Him your highest, purest love. The best thing that you have is your heart; it is that which He desires above everything else; it is more to Him than all your money and possessions. And He wants your heart at its best, when it is unstained by the sins and follies and deceits of the world—in its first freshness, simplicity, and truthfulness, in the golden age of life.

You know that gold is the foundation of all our business. Every bank must hold a sufficient quantity of gold coin against the circulation of its bank notes; and it cannot issue a single note unless it is able to pay it in gold. There must be gold at the back of every business transaction, enabling the seller to get gold if he wishes it for what he sells. The reason of this is that gold is a standard value, and does not change like silver or copper, and therefore the merchant can always get in gold the full standard value of his money. In the East, where silver is the standard, the value of the metal changes very much, so that silver coins sometimes lose a fourth of their nominal value, and a great deal of hardship is caused in that way. If a person who was paid in silver in India for his services were to exchange his silver for gold in this country, he might lose a fourth on the transaction. Now Jesus paid your debt

to divine justice in a far higher coin than that in which you had incurred it. He gave gold for silver to the uttermost farthing. You made your bargain in the debased currency of the world; you sold yourselves for nought; and He redeemed you, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with His own precious blood. The price of your redemption had not a mere fictitious value put upon it, which might have been anything else; it had a real intrinsic worth. For while Jesus was human He was also divine; Man, that He might obey and suffer and die; and God, that He might add to every act of His obedience and suffering the glory of His divine personality. Therefore by one man's obedience can many be made righteous. "And he who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich."

Seeing then that He paid your debts in the purest gold—gold tried in the fire of His own sufferings, and thus made complete satisfaction for your sins—are you not prepared to repay Him, so far as you can repay Him, with the purest gold of your love and service? You have nothing of your own which you have not received from Him. But give Him the best you have, however poor the gift may be, and He will return it to you immensely enriched by His grace. Coins

get their names from the places where they were first made. The guinea was coined about two hundred years ago from gold brought from the Guinea coast in Africa. It was struck in the mint as a twenty-shilling piece; but owing to the purity of the metal, the new coin was so highly prized that it was worth an additional shilling. A guinea became thus the conventional fee for any professional or specially important service. And this is still the rule. It seemed in this way as if the higher the service the more was the standard value of the payment increased. It was paid not by the sovereign or twenty-shilling piece, but by the guinea or twenty-one shilling piece. And should it not be so with you? Should your sovereign not become, so to speak, a guinea when you seek to requite the inestimable services of the Lord Jesus to you? Should your gold of gratitude not be so fine in quality that it cannot be measured by the ordinary standard? Common worldly benefits can be paid by ordinary coins, but heavenly blessings, such as have been bestowed upon you, can only be paid by coins with much higher values. There should be no cautious calculation in the payment of your debt to your Lord—no keeping back part of the price. Let your gift be the expression of your heart—a heart set free from all selfishness and sordidness, and

enlarged by the love of Him who first loved you; realising that you are not your own, but bought with a price the most precious. Paul counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus; but neither his gift nor yours can reach the measure of your Saviour's. How much owest thou thy Lord? Can you sum in full your debt? How much have you paid?

> Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were an offering far too small;
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all.

It would be well if every one realised that gold is a sacred metal, and should only be used for the highest purposes. At Monte Carlo, where people from all parts of the world meet to gamble, there is one table where they play with nothing but gold. The coin used is made at Paris, and bears the image of the Prince of Monaco. It is not in general circulation for ordinary traffic; it is used almost entirely for gambling in this place. Each piece is four times as large as our sovereign, and is a most beautiful work of art. The value of it is one hundred francs, or four pounds sterling. Now do you not think it a fearful desecration to coin the pure gold, which God meant for the highest and holiest purposes, into money of that kind, to minister to the base greed and selfishness

and covetousness of man—to be employed in the service of the devil? Too many, alas! make an equally sinful use of the sacred metal. Surely it would be far better to bring our gold as a present to Jesus, so that He might consecrate and bless it for us, and it might yield to us far more happiness, and accomplish more good in the world, than if we selfishly kept it to ourselves. One of the first gold coins ever minted in our country had engraved on it the cross of Christ, and the motto, "It shall be lifted up in glory." It was a quarter florin of the time of Edward III.; and there was later an English gold coin called an angel, with the device of Michael the archangel trampling upon the dragon, and the legend, "By Thy cross save us, O Christ, our Redeemer." Let the cross of Christ help you to trample under foot the dragon of selfishness and covetousness, and exalt and ennoble your gold, so that no part of it shall be spent in the service of sin and Satan.

The remarkable qualities of pure gold are lost when it is alloyed with the smallest quantity of other metal. You know gold is so malleable that it can be beaten out into the thinnest gold leaf. If you mix the smallest quantity of bismuth with it, the lump of gold, instead of being thus malleable, breaks into little bits under the hammer. Pure gold when melted contracts on cooling more

than any other metal. It cannot therefore be cast in moulds, because in cooling it quits the side of the mould, and does not reproduce the pattern with sufficient accuracy. When Aaron made the image of the golden calf by melting the golden ornaments of the Israelites into a mould, he must, in order to have got a clear image, have debased the gold by mixing with it other metals which counteracted its natural shrinking. Thus the very form of his idolatry, as well as the essence of it, was a corruption of the purity of the fine gold which ought to be offered to the Lord. But Moses preserved the purity of the gold by forming all the sacred vessels of the tabernacle, not by moulding, but by hammering—by beaten work! And how often do people spoil the precious qualities of the gold of their religious service by mixing with it sordid motives and selfish feelings! Their fear of God is taught by the precepts of men. Self-conceit is like mercury. When it touches gold it renders it dull, and a strong fire is needed to expel the alloy and restore the gold to its former brilliancy. One-twelfth of either copper or silver enters into the composition of every gold coin that we use. This makes it harder and more difficult to wear, and therefore more fit for the service of the world. And how often do you hear people say that the pure precepts of God's

Word cannot be used in the world without a little admixture of worldly prudence! The instructions of heaven are too elevated, too pure, too spiritual, to be carried out amid the debasing circumstances and struggles of the everyday world; and therefore they must be toned down and accommodated by a little worldly wisdom to make them serviceable. But such admixtures spoil the pure gold of heavenly love, and deprive it of all the qualities which give it value in God's eyes. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot be spiritually-minded and worldly-minded. Such alloys not only displease God but harm yourselves. They lead to idolatry instead of the worship of the living and true God. And God says of them, "How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!"

What is the gold of your love to Christ to be used for? Even the material gold of the world is adapted to the use that is to be made of it. If, for instance, it is to be converted into coin or jewellery, it is mixed with an alloy to counteract its softness and make it more durable; but if it is to be employed by the dentist, then it must be of the very finest quality, for the slightest alloy would render it unfit for use, and make the juices of the human mouth act unpleasantly and injuriously upon it. Now it is not for earthly but for

heavenly uses that the gold of your love is designed. It is not to enable you to carry on the business of the world but the business of heaven. The gold that you give to Christ is to be employed in the highest services. It is to be set as a seal upon His arm, a seal upon His heart; it is to be made into a crown for His head; and therefore it must be of the finest quality. You are not to put off the Lord with what costs you nothing. You are to love the Lord with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. Your love is to transform and transfigure your whole nature. There must be no admixture of covetousness with this love. You must act in regard to the advice of the world to alloy your gold, as the half-civilised nations with whom the ancient Athenians traded acted in regard to their coins. The first coins of the Athenians were very rude, but they were made of the purest gold. Afterwards, as they became more artistic, they greatly improved the workmanship of the coins. But the nations around would not take the coins. They knew that the old rude ones were pure and genuine, but they suspected the new; and not without cause, for there was an alloy in them; and therefore, however beautiful and artistic their appearance, they rejected them. And so, however specious and beautiful may be the currency of the world

in regard to religious things, you are not to use it instead of the pure gold of heaven. "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold."

The Chinese in their temples present in the act of worship to their gods slips of gilded paper. These joss-papers are meant to express their gratitude to the Supreme Power for the blessings bestowed upon them. Your blessings are far greater than the heathen enjoy; you live in Gospel light and liberty. Therefore let your thankfulness be in relation to theirs as the pure solid gold of Sheba to the merely gilded paper of the Chinese. Above all, let your love be sincere. God cannot accept of what is gilded instead of golden; of the form without the reality. The gold of His land is good; and His city is pure gold like unto clear glass. May the discipline of God's love and Christ's grace make of each of you a golden vessel unto honour sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work!

XXIV

A ROUNDEL

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."—1 CORINTHIANS x. 31.

THREE hundred years ago, in the time of Queen Elizabeth, it was the fashion to have on the table during meals little round plates of thin wood. These plates were painted with a border of flowers and fruit; and in the centre there was printed a motto, a verse of poetry or a text of Scripture. These circular wooden plates were called roundels, and they were used in the same way as we use doilys. No meal was considered complete without them; and they afforded an opportunity for the display of wit and learning. Many of the mottoes were very appropriate; and a good deal of amusement was caused by a covetous man getting a roundel with a text on it warning him to beware of the love of riches; and a man with a quick temper a roundel telling him to let patience have her perfect work; and a man with

a love of good things a roundel with the advice to be not desirous of dainties, for they are deceitful meat. One of the commonest inscriptions on these roundels was the text, "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The fashion of having roundels has long since passed away; but we have a survival of it in the crackers with the mottoes contained in them which appear at our gay feasts and parties, and give so much amusement to those who draw them, and find something suitable to themselves in them.

I am going to revive the good old custom, and to ask each of you to place not in reality, but in your own minds, at every one of your meals a roundel with the inscription of my text upon it. In this way you will remember it better. But, you ask, "How can we glorify God in eating and drinking?" You usually think of God's glory being connected with great and solemn things, such as worshipping in the church, praying and reading the Bible; but eating and drinking seem such common things that you cannot think of any glory coming to God through them. And yet common things glorify God more than rare things. You have only an opportunity now and then to glorify God on great occasions; and in the lives of many humble people such great

occasions never come at all. But you have constant opportunities of glorifying God in little things. Three times every day in every home is the table spread for breakfast, dinner, and supper; and therefore three times every day you have an opportunity of glorifying God. People are apt to divide their life into two distinct portions, one for religion and the other for the world. They have appointed times to worship God, and they have other times for the ordinary business of life. But the apostle tells you that your whole life is to be influenced by the godliness that is profitable unto all things; that your religion is to be seen in the smallest and commonest acts of your life. Scripture tells you that God is not in great things only, but in humble things as well; He is not in the storm only but in the still small voice. And Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a woman baking the household bread, who took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal. It is not the greatness of the act that glorifies God, but the purity and nobleness of the motive. Two young people may be sitting at the same table and eating the same food in the same way; and one may be glorifying God, and the other may have no thought of the kind. One may be praising God for His goodness, and the other may be eating and drinking with unthankful

heart, like the cattle that browse upon the meadow and drink from the stream without knowing whence their food and drink come.

There are some very deep thoughts connected with your eating and drinking. They teach you that you must go out of yourselves to get the supply of your wants. Your hunger and thirst cannot be satisfied from anything in yourselves. You are not self-contained—self-sufficient. You are dependent creatures. You require the help of outward things. And God has provided for your wants. There are things in nature that correspond exactly to the needs of your body—bread and water—and that have the power of satisfying your craving and nourishing you. And does not this common fact point to the higher fact that for all the longings which God has put into your soul, He has provided a supply of what will suit and satisfy them. You must go out of yourselves to get this provision. You must seek it in another, even in Christ Jesus, in whom it hath pleased God that all fulness should dwell—that you might receive out of it the supply of all your wants. Thus your eating and drinking point you to Jesus Christ, the true bread. Common bread is not true bread, for it can satisfy only one part of your nature, and that only for a time. But Christ is the true bread, because He

can satisfy your whole nature always, for evermore. Christ Himself said that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God. It is not the bread itself that satisfies and nourishes you; but the power of God working by the bread as His instrumentality. Bread is merely a dead substance; it is God that gives it the vital principle, that changes the bread into your flesh and bones, and all the substances and forces by which your life is sustained. The life-giving, strength-giving power of bread comes from God; and therefore your common bread teaches you that you are fed directly by God's hand; and that God alone can satisfy the nature He has made in His own image.

Then, too, eating and drinking are personal acts. You have each of you to eat and drink for yourself. Your eating and drinking will not nourish the bodies of others; nor will the eating and drinking of others support your life. And does not this simple common fact teach you the lesson that you must each of you feed upon the Lord Jesus for yourself? Except ye eat—each one of you for himself—for herself—the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. It is not enough to trust in a general salvation—to shelter yourselves behind your friends, or your minister; you must come to

Christ yourselves personally, and put your trust in Him. You must say not "our Lord"—"our God"—but "my Lord and my God." If your common food thus leads your thoughts to these great truths of salvation, then you glorify God in your eating and drinking.

Then, further, your common food speaks to you of death. It is because you are dying creatures that you need food. You are dying every day, and therefore you need your daily bread. With every movement you make and every thought you think, you use up and waste so much muscle and nerve and brain; and the waste has to be made good by constant supplies of nourishment. You are dying bit by bit; and bit by bit you must be restored by your food. The particles of your body that die in you and are cast out, must be replaced by new ones. Your bodies, like Penelope's loom, are daily built up and daily taken down. And thus while you eat and drink to maintain yourselves in life, you are reminded of your frailty and dependence upon God and kept humble.

And not only are you made to think of your own dying—you are made to think of the dying of the substance of your food in order to give you life. The corn of wheat must die in order that it may bring forth fruit; the corn stalk and

blade must wither in order that the full corn in the ear may be formed; the full corn in the ear must die in the ripeness of the harvest and be ground in the mill to make your bread. Thus the corn yields its life to support your life. And are you not reminded in this of Jesus, the true bread, who died for you that you might live; who was bruised and crushed like the wheat, pressed in the wine-press of suffering like the grapes, that He might be the nourishment of your souls? The sacrament of the Lord's Supper puts before you in a very vivid and touching way this great picture of life out of death—your life supported by the death of your Saviour.

The curse of sin rests upon the bread of man as well as upon man himself: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life." The corn is produced from a corruptible substance; it is in itself a corruptible substance; good and evil, life and death are mixed up with it. Why do you ask a blessing upon your food before you partake of it? It is because man's bread is cursed on account of sin, and must be freed by God from this curse, else it cannot benefit us. Why do you say "for Christ's sake" at the close of your grace before meat? Is it not because you connect your food with the finished work and meritorious sacrifice

of Christ? It was necessary that Jesus should die in order that not only your souls, but also your bodies should live. It is the constant goodness of God through the sacrifice of His own Son that restrains the curse, which would otherwise make your very food a poison, and minister disease and death, and not health and strength, and produces the blessing by which your food nourishes you. You have no natural right to your food, any more than the condemned criminal has a right to the bread and water that sustains him until he is executed. Man as a sinner, an outlaw, under condemnation, can have no possessions, no rights. But trusting in Him who purchased your lives and possessions from the forfeiture of the fall and the curse of sin by His own blood, you have a covenant right to your daily bread. It is yours for His sake; and so restored to you it is invested with new virtue. It proves a blessing both to your bodies and your souls. Whether you eat or drink, you can do all in consequence to the glory of God.

The food that God gives you is to be employed in His service alone. That is the reason why you get your daily bread. It is that you may get health and strength and leisure to glorify God. Your food comes from God, and it ought to go back in you to God. If you use it

for your own ends, merely to satisfy your bodily wants, then you rob God and injure yourselves. But if the food that comes from God is, through your right use of it, laid upon God's altar of obedience and service, then it will glorify God and benefit yourselves. During one of the many rebellions in Ireland a little English drummer-boy was made prisoner and his drum was taken from him by the rebels. They wanted him to play a tune on it. The boy refused. "But we will kill you if you don't," said the rebels. "I don't care," said the lad. "Well, if you won't play a tune on it, I will," said one of the rebels, stretching forth his hand to take the drum. In a moment, with an angry flash in his eye, the little soldier leaped through the drum head, breaking it to pieces, shouting, "The king's drum shall never be beat by rebels"—and fell pierced through with the bayonets of the enemy. Act the brave part of this little soldier. Never use your bodies, which are God's, fed by His bread, in the service of sin and Satan. Never use your members as instruments of unrighteousness. Be loyal in all things to your King, and whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.

XXV

LAID-UP GOODNESS

"Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee."—PSALMS xxxi. 19.

IN Switzerland and Norway the snow on the tops of the lofty mountains never melts summer or winter. It remains and accumulates, and by its own weight it presses downwards and forms in the hollows those great streams of solid ice which are called glaciers. These glaciers move onwards at a rate so very slow that if you were watching them a whole day you would see little or no change in their appearance; and at last they reach a point far below, where the air is so warm that the end of the icy mass melts and forms rivers, which flow to the sea. God by this wonderful provision of nature lays up in store vast quantities of water upon the mountains for the refreshment of the valleys and plains at their foot. Without these glaciers the moisture that falls upon the mountain tops would speedily run off in raging torrents.

scattering ruin over all the fields below. But by the help of these glaciers the water is brought down to the places where it is needed in a manner so gradual and so continuous that there is never any risk of a too scanty or a too copious supply.

The Psalmist saw an arrangement somewhat of the same kind in God's dealings with men. God lays up His goodness, and gives it out to us gradually and continuously as we need it, instead of bestowing it upon us all at once, or by fits and starts, when it might do us more harm than good. We are apt to complain of this manner of treating us. We think that it is as cold as a glacier, that God's goodness is frozen in an icy caution, since it is parted with so slowly and so carefully. But even the glacier melts at its end, and produces the free glad river; so God's apparently cold reserve has a melting-point, and from it comes the beautiful stream that gladdens and fertilises our life. When we think deeply of it we shall find that the arrangement with which we are apt to find fault, which restrains our blessings, and doles them out to us slowly and carefully, is as wise in the human world as the likeness of it is in the natural world.

We are all by nature inclined to be extravagant about our things. We want to get them all at once. We wish to enjoy them all at the

beginning; and it is only by the sore teaching of experience that we learn to lay aside a portion for the future. If one of you boys had to do a day's work in your garden, you would begin with the greatest energy, and in a very short time you would use up all your strength, and be obliged to stop; whereas the day labourer, accustomed to the work, would begin in a slow cautious way, reserving his strength and letting it out by degrees, and thus he would be able to hold on till sunset without wearing himself out. If you had a long journey to take, you would, in all likelihood, go so fast at the outset that you would soon be quite tired; whilst an experienced traveller would go on with calm, deliberate steps, mile after mile, until he got to the end. Young people are very impatient to get all that life promises to them at the commencement. They want to grow up into men and women immediately, that they may get the larger and freer life which they think older people have. And many young persons are so impatient that they burn the candle, as the proverb says, at both ends. They waste their life by crowding too much pleasure and too much activity into it; they have exhausted their powers in riotous living, and they have no reserve of capacity for enjoyment laid up for their older years; and thus they are preparing for themselves

a vacant and miserable old age if they are spared to see it.

It is God's law that if we strive to get too much into our life, we limit rather than enlarge it. In our efforts to get more than God deems it good for us to have at the time, we too often reduce the good that we have. When I was a boy at school there was nothing I liked so much during the play-hours as to go to my father's field, about the end of September, and give the cow that was tethered there another length of chain among the rich clover, when the previous portion had been eaten bare. At such times I often found that the cow, in her efforts to get more clover than was good for her, had wound her chain round and round the staple that was fixed in the earth, and had thus reduced her own movements to a very small space. There she would stand a close prisoner, lowing piteously, tormented by the sight of the rich clover which she could not reach, unable even to toss her head, and so rid herself of the flies that plagued her. Like the cow in our effort to get a good beyond our reach we narrow the freedom we possess, and lose the advantages we enjoy.

The great charm of life is expectation and hope—the feeling that we have something to look forward to—that to-morrow we shall have something new. Supposing a child got a present of a

small cabinet, with a great many drawers in it, each filled with curiosities. If the child were allowed to open all the drawers at once, one after the other, and rummage at its own will among the contents, how long do you think would the child be interested in its plaything? In a couple of hours, at the most, it would have seen and enjoyed everything, and the cabinet would be neglected in the desire to get a new toy, and it would never be looked at again. But supposing the child was allowed only to open one drawer each day, do you not think that by having its pleasure thus laid up in store for it, and spreading it over many days, it would get in the long run not only more enjoyment from the cabinet, but it would examine the objects in the drawers one by one, more carefully and attentively; and thus it would be furnished with useful knowledge, and with thoughts and ideas that would interest it for a long time, and make it go back again and again to take out the drawers? Well, that is the way, my dear young friends, in which God is dealing with you. He has given to you a cabinet, as it were, in which He has laid up all manner of delights. But if you are in haste to get all that He has laid up at once, you will not only exhaust the interest of these delights, but even your own capacity of enjoying them. Life will become tame and weary and unprofitable, and

you will have nothing to look forward to. But if you use that which God has prepared for you wisely and carefully, then you will get the utmost good out of it; you will spread out your feast of enjoyment over all your life, and you can look forward with fresh expectation to get out of God's good things day by day what you need.

This is the end of the harvest, and you know that the farmers all over the country are laying up in their barns the fruits of the field for the long cold winter; and during the dark dreary season, when they cannot work, they get out of this laid-up provision the supply of all their wants. The wild dumb creatures of God are taught by Him with an unerring instinct to do the same. The bees lay up honey in summer on which to feed when there are no flowers; and the ants gather heaps of seeds to sustain them when they can get no new ones. Even the plant does the same. What is the meaning of the big bulb of the onion or the turnip, or the long thick root of the carrot and the parsnip? Is it not just this, that the plant has laid up in these storehouses a supply of nourishment on which it may feed when it is going to shoot up into leaves and flowers? And so He who has laid up such goodness for the wild creatures of the earth, has laid up for you, if you love the Lord Jesus, such a wonderful amount of goodness that

you will never be able to exhaust it. For it pleased the Father that in Christ Jesus *all* fulness should dwell, that we might receive out of that fulness, and grace for grace. Your happiness in Christ Jesus is invested. It is a treasure in heaven, a treasure in your own heart, out of which you get rich interest from time to time. A wise father says to his young boy, "I have got a beautiful watch for you, but I will keep it till you are old enough to know the value of it, and to use it aright." And so God lays up precious and beautiful things for you till you are ready to understand and enjoy them. He gives you much now, but the great bulk of His goodness is reserved for the future. You are going forward to your richest possessions, while those who have their portion in this world are leaving their possessions behind them and going forward to emptiness and poverty; for we are told that when they die in that day their very thoughts perish. You have now the first-fruits; you will have afterwards the whole harvest. You have here the earnest; you will have in heaven the inheritance.

And how are you to get this goodness which is laid up for you? It is laid up, we are told, for those who fear God. This linking of fear with God's goodness teaches you that it must be a good and not an evil thing; that it is not the fear of

wrath that the Psalmist is speaking of, but the fear of love. For those who are so afraid of God that they run away from Him, and will have nothing to do with Him, there is not, and there cannot be, any goodness laid up. They get nothing for their fear, because their fear does themselves no good; it does not qualify or prepare them to receive and enjoy what God has laid up for them. They do not care for that kind of goodness, and they cannot get it. But for those who fear God in such a way that they come nearer to Him and seek in all things to do His will, and to avoid what is displeasing in His sight, there is great goodness laid up, because their fear prepares and qualifies them to receive and enjoy that goodness. And the amount of goodness will be in proportion to the fear. Those who fear God little have a small supply of His goodness. But those who fear Him most, with all their heart and life, must in this way get most out of His laid-up goodness. There are great stores of coal which for millions of years have been laid up by God under the rocks of the earth for man's use. But man cannot get at these stores without labour; and he who tries most gets the largest reward. And so you cannot get at God's laid-up goodness without the labour of the soul, without loving Him with all your heart, and serving Him with all your power.

It is the young believers who get the largest share of this laid-up goodness of God. Old people who begin late in life to fear the Lord, get indeed much of this goodness,—far more than they deserve, for having so long neglected Him and served the world; but it is those who begin early that get it all along their life, so that none of it is wasted. I have heard of a bright young spirit who got so weary of life that he put an end to it, leaving behind in the place where he shot himself a slip of paper, on which he wrote just before he dropped his pen for ever, "The good things come off so seldom." That was not David's experience when he said, "Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life." That will not be your experience if you fear the Lord in your youth; if you have that kind of godly fear which is its own blessedness—that new kind of tears which make happy those who shed them. The good things, the things that are truly good, will come off for you often. You will have them new every morning and fresh every evening.

I remember seeing two beautiful pictures which showed the goodness of life and the sadness of life in a very striking way. In the one picture you saw a gay company of youthful revellers in a boat gliding down a river to the sound of merry music; and on the bank, under a withered tree, with a broken

harp at his feet, an old man looking sadly at them. The evening shadows were falling, and a gray coldness was creeping over the landscape, making it very dreary and forlorn. The other picture was the famous one by Ary Scheffer, in which Monica and her son Augustine were gazing from a window in their garden at Ostia, near Rome. The sky was a deep soft blue with a bright star in it. The peace of God was on the two saintly faces. They were speaking of that which cannot change; and they said to each other that if this moment were only continued it would itself be the fulfilment of the words, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Begin young to fear the Lord, as did these pious souls, and like them you can look back at the end it may be of many years spent in fearing and enjoying God, and can say with deepest wonder and gratitude, "How great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!" You will have no withered tree as the symbol of the evening of a wasted life, but the pure sky and the bright evening star which will soon fade into the light of eternal day. And great as the goodness received here may have been, it will be nothing in comparison with what God has laid up for you in heaven—in that kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

XXVI

FADED AND WIND-DRIVEN LEAVES

"We all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away."—ISAIAH lxiv. 6.

THE great object lesson which nature is now teaching us is that "we all do fade as a leaf." This lesson is whispered by every wind that moans through the yellow woods. Every red leaf that hangs upon the bough or falls silently upon the ground pictures the same sad truth. Every autumn God is spreading before us a great parable, in which our own decay is so vividly shown to us that he who runs may read, and he who reads must reflect and benefit. In the fresh bright morning of life such thoughts may seem unsuitable for you, to whom death is but a far-off cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, casting no shadow on your sunny horizon. But death has all seasons for its own, and the young fade as well as the old. It is good at any time of life to consider the end and measure of our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. A

godly minister, who was fond of visiting his sick and dying people on Saturday afternoon, was asked by a brother minister, who met him on this errand one day, why he did this, instead of staying at home and preparing his sermons, replied, "I like to take a look over the brink." And even for the youngest of you it is not an unpleasant, as assuredly it is not an unprofitable exercise, to take a look now and then over the brink of your little life here and see where it ends, and another life stretches out far beyond. You know there is no soil in which a tree can grow better than that which is formed by the decay of its own leaves; and there is nothing more helpful to the soul's growth in grace than such meditations upon the shortness of human life as cause us to cling more closely to Him who alone hath life.

I daresay you have wondered sometimes why the leaves should be made so beautiful every spring, only to fade and fall every autumn. Why, you are ready to think, could they not have been so contrived that they would remain continually upon the trees fresh and green like the ivy? We know not all the reasons why they are made to fade and fall off; but we may be sure that an important purpose in nature is served by their doing so; and we know that if they did not act in this way we should lose a wise lesson every

year which we greatly need to learn. You have heard, perhaps, in the beautiful Greek story of Penelope, how, when her long absent husband was supposed to be lost, she put off her eager suitors by promising to marry one of them when she had finished a web that she was weaving; and how, in order to gain time, for she believed that her husband would return to her, she took down every night the work of each day. Well, nature, like Penelope, weaves and unweaves her web of loveliness each season for a similar reason, not to mock you with false hopes, but to wean you from false loves, and teach you to wait and prepare for the true love of your souls, which is found not in the passing shadows of earth but in the abiding realities of heaven. This is the secret of all her apparent wastefulness. By taking down in these October days the bright web of beautiful foliage which she wove in the summer time, she is appealing to all that is deepest and truest in your spiritual nature; and through her fading leaves and all her fleeting glories she is speaking to you words of eternal life, whereby your souls may be enriched and beautified for evermore.

You ask me what is the cause of the fading and the falling of the leaf? The explanation is very simple. When a leaf is green and growing it has a firm hold of the branch to which it is

attached. It partakes of the life of the tree; the general sap circulates in its veins. It is in consequence strong and fresh, and does its work in the economy of the tree vigorously. But by and by, as the season advances, and the light of the sun gets colder and feebler in the shorter days of the closing year, the leaf loses its vital powers, and lets go its hold of the branch on which it grew; the sap ceases to flow through its veins, and then it rusts away into the various tints of autumn. And soon it drops off the branch altogether by its own weight of deadness, or by a puff of wind, or by the sharp bite of the frost, and it lies on the ground a sad wreck of what it was. Thus you see the leaf fades and falls because it loses its hold of the tree. Now the prophet Isaiah compared the people of Israel to such a faded leaf. Their national prosperity was gone; the beauty of their holiness had disappeared; they had no longer the vital energy and strength which they once possessed. And the reason was that, like the faded leaf which loses its hold upon the tree that sustains it, they had lost their hold upon God, who was the source of all their blessings. They had alienated themselves from Him by wicked works. They went after other gods, and God had withdrawn Himself from them, and had ceased to favour them. And just as the coldness of the sun

makes the leaves to wither at the end of the year, so the coldness of God to them because of their sins made them to droop and pine in the misery which they themselves had provoked.

And so it is by being united to Christ that you keep the true life of your soul. He is the Branch, and out of Him you get all that you need to make you fresh and flourishing. And in proportion as the life of Christ quickens and inspires you, in proportion as you live in the sunshine of His presence, so do you preserve the bloom and the beauty of your life. But if you lose your hold of Him, if you go after your own things and live for yourselves and not to Him, then a process of decay commences in your soul. Sin robs life of its bright promise, and makes it a dreary waste—dries up all the freshness and fairness. You grow dull of heart and are out of harmony with God's living world. When any one gives up loving God and living for Him, the sad effect is soon seen in the seared conscience, and the hardened heart, and the withered life.

But the prophet says that something worse happened to the Israelites. Not only had they all faded like leaves, but their iniquities like the wind had carried them away. They were swept by the storm of judgment which their iniquities had provoked into captivity in Babylon, from

which very few of them returned. We are apt to stop at the first part of the text, and say with a feeling of poetic sadness and tender self-pity, "We all do fade as a leaf." We see in it merely a picture of the fate of mortals, of the shortness and vanity of human life. But the prophet tells us that we have brought this fate upon ourselves by our sin—that the fading of our life which we mourn as a misfortune, we ought to lament as the result of sin calling for repentance. And he goes on to show that what happens to the faded leaf in nature happens to those who wilfully sin against God. Losing their hold of God, they lose their control over themselves, and become a prey to every temptation to evil that comes in their way. They cannot resist the force of circumstances, and they are driven into wicked courses and miserable ways almost against their will. How easily the leaf through which the sap of the tree no longer flows, which has no more a living connection with it, can be separated from the branch on which it hangs trembling, by a mere breath of air which would scarcely agitate it when it was green and growing!

At this time of the year the pavements in the western parts of our town are littered with the dead leaves that have fallen from the over-hanging trees; and you notice how the least puff of wind sends them scurrying away. They can

offer no resistance. The wind can do with them what it pleases, and blow them into garden soil or upon the hard streets to be trodden under foot. When they were green and fresh on the tree, the life of the tree kept firm hold of them, and the wind blew around them and through them, but its fiercest blasts could not separate them from their parent branch. But when they lost their own life and became withered, they lost their connection with the life of the tree; and falling from the control of the higher law of vegetable life, they came under the control of the lower law of dead matter. Ceasing to perform the purpose of life, they became waifs, swept out by the dead wind. And so it is with a soul that loses its hold of God, and becomes in consequence dead in sin. It is your hold of God that lifts you above the evil course of the world, and strengthens you to overcome its temptations. But losing that hold you come under the evil powers of the world, which drag you down to the dishonouring dust. You become the slaves of circumstances. You are led captive by the devil at his will. It is a terrible thought that when you fall from the higher law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, you come under the lower law of sin and death. You lose that individuality—that distinct personal life which each of you has—that masterly faculty which the spirit

of God produces and develops, and are controlled, notwithstanding all your caprices and waywardnesses, by laws which apply to mere things; and men can calculate the very nature and amount of the sins and crimes you will commit, as they can calculate an eclipse or a tide.

What a contrast there is between the living and the faded leaf! The living leaf, growing on the living branch, because of its life lays all nature under contribution for its well-being; makes all things willing ministers to it; draws its life and support from earth and sky, from sunshine and shower, and changes all the contributions it receives into beautiful foliage. But the faded leaf, on the other hand, because of its loss of life, loses its hold of the tree and of the earth that nourished it, is blown about by the idle wind as a dead thing that has no part to play in the living world, and descends rapidly to join the dust of the earth. All things are hostile to it. The same air and sunshine, which are the cause of health and beauty to the living leaf, are the cause of more rapid decay to the faded leaf.

In nature there is no power by which a once faded leaf can be restored to its original freshness. But you are not under the law, but under grace. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." What

you want is One in whom you can live, and from whom you can always draw strength and nourishment to sustain you against the continual sentence of sin and pressure of death. United by faith and love to this living, all-powerful Saviour, as surely as you carry sin within you, so surely is He within you who is the conqueror of sin, and will set you free from its law. As surely as you have death within you, so surely will you have life within you that will destroy death. You all do fade as a leaf—the youngest of you. But there is an experiment in grafting well known to gardeners, by which some kinds of leaves that in themselves are annual can be made perennial by grafting them on the twigs that produced them. United to the more enduring structure by this process, they share in the prolonged existence of that structure; they change from the condition of frail perishing leaves to the condition of firm enduring branches; and while their former companions become faded and fall off in the frosts of autumn, they continue fresh and green through all the changes of the seasons. So your fragile leaf-like lives, which must one day fade and fall in the autumn of life that awaits us all, by being united through faith to Him whose name is the Branch, will partake of His everlasting endurance; and neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, can separate you from His love.

XXVII

THE GAME OF THE TORCH

"Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children."—PSALMS xlv. 16.

ONE of the most instructive of the ancient fables of Greece is that of Prometheus. He climbed up to heaven and stole the fire that burnt upon the hearth of Jupiter, and brought it down to men. Before this mankind had no knowledge of fire, and were in misery for want of it. But by this divine gift they were enabled to keep themselves warm, and to fashion tools for the cultivation of the earth; and the fire on the hearth became the very centre of domestic life, gave the feeling of home, and united the whole community in close social bonds. For this daring theft Jupiter, jealous of mankind possessing such powers as the use of fire gave them, and angry on account of the pollution of the celestial element by its being employed in the common uses of human life, condemned Prometheus to

be chained alive to a rock on the top of a remote ice-bound peak of the mountains of Caucasus, and to have his liver continually gnawed by a vulture. But though the gods thus severely punished Prometheus, mankind, grateful for his precious gift to them, highly honoured him. In memory of him they instituted one of the most remarkable of the festivals of Greece—the "Game of the Torch." In this game the competitors ran a race, each carrying a lighted torch. They did all they could to keep their torches burning; but as they ran one after another stumbled or fell, and the torches flickered or went out; and when this happened the bearers withdrew themselves from the contest, and gave place to those next after them. These in their turn ran as long as they could, giving way to those behind them when some accident caused their torches to expire. And the winner of the prize was the first who brought his lighted torch to the goal.

This remarkable old game is a very expressive emblem of the race of life. Life is just a "game of the torch." Each generation starts on the race of life with torches lighted where Prometheus got his fire—from a divine source, by the Father of lights, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Every good gift cometh down from above; and this good gift of light God bestows upon each generation. He

gives new light to each new generation suitable to the new circumstances in which it is placed, and the new work it has to do. Each generation sets out with its torches burning brightly, a strong and hopeful band. But as the competitors run in the race, one after another stumbles and falls. Death overtakes them, and each hands his torch on to the next before it expires. And thus the last brave spirit carries it on to the goal with swifter and surer steps, burning brightly to the end. It is the most blessed hope which the old have, when they know that their own work is done and they can do no more, that instead of the fathers shall be the children—that younger spirits shall rise up after them, and catch the torch of truth, and make it burn more brightly and illumine more of the world's darkness. And thus generation after generation in this great and wonderful game of the torch will transmit light to each other—that light which the first generation received direct from heaven. The work will go on though the workers die. The light will never be extinguished, though the generations perish.

I daresay the thought rises up sometimes in the minds of some of you, why it is that one generation passeth away and another generation cometh in this fashion. Why could not God have allowed

the same generation to live on for ever? Is there not a great waste in the present plan; is it not the cause of much pain and sorrow? We read of the gray old fathers before the flood, that they lived to a very great age. Methuselah during his long life must have fully developed all his powers and capacities, and accumulated much knowledge and experience. Such a man must have done an enormous amount of work, and yet we are told nothing of it; we are told simply that he was born and had children and died. We are told that this great prolonging of individual human life was not good for the advancement of the human race. In the days of the long-lived patriarchs mankind lived more wickedly than at any other period, so that God was compelled to destroy them by the flood.

It may seem strange to say it; and yet the shortness of human life is more favourable for the improvement of it than if it were lengthened out far more. You know how even in our short life we are so prone to put off till to-morrow what should be done to-day; and would not this habit be greatly increased if we could afford to squander much of our time, having so much still to fall back upon? Besides, such long lives would become monotonous and stereotyped; they would make ruts of habit and experience so deep that the

wheels of life could not get out of them into a new track, and would be compelled to run on in the same grooves to the end. There would be no progress of the race. Even in our short lives, a man or a woman can only advance a little way. After forty most persons become stereotyped ; the character is fixed. You know what they are, and what they will likely be and do during the rest of their life. There is no further mystery of growth about them, no more hopes or surprises. Further progress would therefore be impossible were it not that another generation, young and full of new life and energy, comes forward, carries on the work of the world a few steps, and becomes stereotyped in its turn. Thus you see that the very shortness of human life is a great gain to the whole race.

Each father expects his son to do what he has failed to do. And thus the light grows larger and brighter as it goes on from one generation to another. There are times when we ourselves are tired and dispirited because of our work ; and we think that God too must be weary of this long, ever - beginning, never - ending strife and struggle. You wonder why He keeps up generation after generation going on in the same way and doing the same things, and going through the same sufferings of birth and death. Why does

He not end it all at once? The reason why He fainteth not, neither is weary, is because He sees far on at the close of the ages, a glorious end which will justify all the vast expenditure of human life, and compensate for all human toils and sufferings,—when Christ shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied. He sees that by sending new generations one after another upon the earth, instead of the fathers the children—old evils will be removed, new methods will be tried, and mankind will advance in refinement and culture. His Gospel will unfold new wonders to new races; and His scheme of salvation will develop its infinite fulness to the growing wants of new generations. And the kingdom of heaven, which at first was as small as a grain of mustard seed, will become a great tree, filling all the earth with its shadow, and satisfying all mankind with its fruit. Have you ever carefully watched the growth of a plant in a flower-pot? Well! you have seen that the leaves become better formed, finer in structure and texture, the higher up the plant they grow—the nearer the plant comes to the flowering. So is it with the generations of men; they are becoming through the Gospel of Jesus Christ more perfect the nearer they come to the period when all mankind shall wear the white flower of a blameless life.

Now, my dear young friends, you are each of you one of the links in the chain of God's wonderful scheme of development. It is by your life and your work that the progress of mankind is to be carried on. Each of you has to do something towards it. Each of you is necessary, or you would not be here. God could not do without you, or He would not have created you. Not only do your parents expect that you will be better than they are, God expects it too, that you will make the world fairer and holier and happier by your presence and your work in it. And it is for this purpose that He has given you His own Son to be your Saviour and Example, and placed you amid all the advantages of this country in the end of the nineteenth century. In a few years at the most the present generation that is before you will become old and useless and then pass away, and you will have to step to the front. A teacher once said to the boys of his class, "Who are to be the future magistrates of the city?" The ungrammatical but true reply was, "Us boys."—"Who are to be the future merchants and ministers and teachers?" "Us boys."—"Who are to be the respectable citizens and good members of the Church; who are to do all the good works that shall be required of them?"—"Us boys."—"And who are to be the drunkards and the evil-doers and the plague of

their fellows ?" The reply to this case was involuntary, "Us boys," but it startled them, and made them think what responsibilities lay upon them, and what dangers they incurred as they grew up to fill the posts of those who had to pass away.

And I would have you think seriously of what is involved in the words of my text, when it says "instead of thy fathers shall be thy children." A simple country schoolmaster in Germany was always in the habit of taking off his hat when he entered the schoolroom. He was asked why he did this, when all other schoolmasters kept on their hats. He replied that he took off his hat in token of respect to the future great men and women that were to come out of the boys and girls whom he was teaching. And he was right, for one of his scholars was Martin Luther, the great Reformer. And we grown-up people may well be filled with awe and respect as we look at you children, and think that the future of the world is with you. We may well be earnest in our prayers, as we think of the positions you are to fill and the work that you have to do, that God may guide you aright. We may well be earnest in our efforts to train you so, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, that when you are old you will not depart from it. And you yourselves must be in earnest to improve your present opportunities

to the utmost, so as to serve your generation faithfully and effectually. These opportunities are greater than those which your fathers have enjoyed ; your responsibilities therefore are greater, for to whom much is given, of them much also shall be required.

A young student in the Edinburgh University at the beginning of this session had a dear friend of his own age. They arranged at the beginning of a week to have a walk together over the Pentland Hills on the Saturday. On that Saturday, instead of walking together over the hills, the student followed the remains of his friend in the sad funeral procession to the grave. One of the last acts of the young man was to buy for his companion a torch, to be carried by him in the torch-light procession of the students on the occasion of the election of the Lord Rector of the University. The student regarded that touching gift as a sacred symbol that he was to take up his friend's torch, and carry on his life-work in the world. The dead friend had been accustomed to hold a little religious service among the sick in the Infirmary every Sunday afternoon ; and this service the living friend resolved to continue as the best way of perpetuating his memory. Now, my dear young friends, one after another of your companions and friends will pass away as you grow up ; for death

is busy among the young as well as the old. Be it yours to carry on the good work which they had it in their heart to do, and which they would have done had they been spared. Be it yours to catch the torch from your fathers as they resign it confidently into your hands, and to keep it burning brightly amid all the darknesses of the world; so that God may have a seed to serve Him when this generation shall have fallen asleep, and His Church may be an eternal excellency—a joy of many generations. Feed your torch with the oil of grace; trim it by your constant efforts to do good. Ask Jesus to hold up your goings that you may not slide, and so endanger its safety. And so you will come to the goal with your torch burning bright. You will win the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus. You will have made your good works so shine before men that they seeing them will have been induced to glorify your Father in heaven.

A favourite ornament in the iron railing that surrounds cemeteries is composed of torches turned upside down. That was a heathen idea, originally meant to express that life was for ever extinguished by death. But the Christian idea is the true one,—what happens in reality in ordinary experience,—that the torch is not extinguished when it is turned upside down by

death, but only made to burn brighter. And so if you live in the Lord, you will die in the Lord, and death will only turn your torch upside down, that it may burn more brightly in the purer air of heaven.

THE END

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CONTENTS

PAGE

THE BIBLE—

History of the Bible 1

Biblical History 1

The Old Testament 1

The New Testament 3

HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH 5

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND 6

DEVOTIONAL BOOKS 7

THE FATHERS 8

HYMNOLOGY 9

SERMONS, LECTURES, ADDRESSES, AND THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS 9

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